WHERE THE SHAMROCK GROWS

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Irene Dwen Andrews

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WHERE THE SHAMROCK GROWS

The sky is soft above her, and her sod is green below it;
Her heart beats warm for friendship, but is steel against her foes;
She's the mother of the soldier, she's the cradle of the poet;
She's the land of song and legend where the Shamrock grows.

To M. A. J.

WHERE THE SHAMROCK GROWS

The Fortunes and Misfortunes
of an Irish Family

By
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"My Lady Molly," "Shamus O'Brien,"
etc., etc., etc.

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WHERE THE SHAMROCK GROWS

CHAPTER I.

An Irish Amazon.

"That horse is running away," exclaimed Gerald Delaney, standing up on his side of the jaunting car and shading his eyes as he gazed down the road.

"And there's a lady on his back," cried Jack Whalen, imitating his companion's action, while the driver reined in his sorry steed, and the thunder of galloping hoofs on the hard macadam sounded louder and closer.

"Pull the car across the road," commanded Gerald. "That will stop him."

"Do ye want me to turn him down the boreen," remonstrated the jarvey. "It's into the river he'd go then, an' maybe drown the lady."

There was reason in this. A narrow lane ran at right angles from the high road down to the river bank, and it seemed likely that the runaway, finding an obstacle in his path, might take the course old Moriarty indicated.

"Do something then, confound you," cried

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Gerald, and Moriarty drew his car with elaborate care to one side and then looked back at the rapidly approaching horse.

"Glory be, it's Miss Fetherstone," he exclaimed, "an' that mad divil of a chestnut is in under her."

They were close at hand by this time—the wildly galloping horse, blinded by rage or terror, and the slender, erect figure of the rider. She sat bravely, and though the hands that grasped the reins were powerless to control or guide the great hunter, there was no white signal of distress on her cheeks, no flinching in her attitude.

Gerald seized a rug from the car, and running forward almost under the trampling feet, he spread it in the horse's face. It swerved and half turned, almost unseating its rider. Then Gerald flung the rug over its head, hoping to blindfold the animal.

He was partially successful. The rug settled over the ears and hung a moment over the muzzle. With an angry toss the horse flung it aside and then, facing round as if to leap the tall quick set hedge at the road side, it reared almost erect, fighting the air with its forefeet.

Gerald grasped for the bridle and flung all his weight on one side with the object of bringing the animal down. In this he succeeded beyond his expectation. There was a moment's struggle, a grinding and slipping of trampling hoofs, and all three, horse, rider, and would-be rescuer, came to the ground together.

Miss Fetherstone was on her feet first. The chestnut lay on its side, Jack Whalen, who had sprung to the rescue scarce a second later than his friend, securely seated on its head. Gerald scrambled up and stood nursing his arm which felt as if it had been wrenched from the socket. The whole episode had been contained in the space of a minute, and now the sound of hoofs, pounding the hard road and drawing momentarily nearer, announced that the lady's groom was hastening to the assistance of his mistress.

Kate Fetherstone and Gerald Delaney, panting and mud-bespattered, stood facing each other, and the latter spared a thought from his tingling arm, to own to himself he had seldom looked on as handsome a woman. Her hat was somewhat awry, and her hair, shaken loose from its fastenings, streamed down to her waist and below it, a magnificent mantle, deep tawny red, shot with gold as it caught the level rays of the westering November sun. She was flushed with her adventurous ride, and as she stood, her bosom rising and falling as she caught her breath, she made as fair a picture as one might hope to view whether in London drawing room or on Irish road side.

So thought Gerald as he stood and allowed his eyes their will of her, for hers were on her fallen horse. Then he spoke, raising his hat with as much grace as his stiffening shoulder would permit.

"You are not hurt, I hope?"

He realised that her eyes were brown as they met his—or were they hazel?

"Not in the least," she answered, "but that was a terribly risky thing you did—hanging on to a horse's bridle just as he was rising for a leap. You might have made him shake himself."

Gerald, who had expected compliments and thanks, was taken aback. "I was concerned for your safety, not that of the horse," he said.

"Oh, thank you. Nothing ever hurts me," she replied, and then turned to the smart groom who had just ridden up and dismounted. "Is he any the worse, Nolan?"

"Are ye any the worse yerself, Miss?" the man cried. "Glory be! The sight left me eyes when I seen him bolt. If he'd struck the parapet of the bridge or wheeled down the boreen—"

"He did neither," she interrupted impatiently. "See to Red Rover will you, and never mind me."

Nolan bent over the prostrate horse and seized the rein.

"Stand clear, sir, av' ye plaze," he said, and, Jack Whalen relieving the animal of his weight, Red Rover scrambled to his feet and stood quiet with lowered head and heaving flanks. The fierce spirit had exhausted itself temporarily at least.

Nolan viewed him critically.

"The crutch of the saddle's broke an' one girth is burst," he remarked. Then he led the panting horse a step or two forward and a cry of consternation went up from Miss Fetherstone.

"He's dead lame," she exclaimed, and cast

a reproachful look at Gerald which seemed to say "Now see what you've done."

Nolan stooped and felt the leg from knee to fetlock joint.

"It's only a bit of a strain, I think," he said. "Leastways there's nothing broke. Ye're well out of it Miss, the pair o' ye. A few days' rest an' a drop of Elliman, an' he'll be able an' willin' to break yer neck again, plaze God."

"And if you have any of that Elliman to spare I'll borrow some to rub on my shoulder."

Gerald was unable to resist the temptation thus to call attention to his own services. That so much interest should be lavished on a beast which had been lamed by its own misbehaviour, while no one paid the smallest attention to the real hero of the occasion, seemed to him flagrantly unjust. His shoulder had ceased to pain, but that was no reason why he should be defrauded of his due.

Miss Fetherstone turned quickly.

"Are you hurt? I am so sorry. I didn't know. Your shoulder, is it? Do you think you could get your coat off? We are all surgeons, more or less, in these parts when it comes to accidents in the hunting field."

There was real sympathy in her voice, and Gerald felt a little ashamed of himself.

"It's nothing to signify," he answered lightly. "I was only joking about the Elliman. My arm was a bit wrenched, but it's all right now," and he swung it, albeit somewhat gingerly, in proof.

"You came off very well," the lady answered, and he shifted uneasily under the steady regard of the brown eyes. "I ought to thank you very much, for of course you acted with the best intentions, even if you did lame Red Rover. But never do such a thing again. It's too much to expect of any horse to rise to a leap with ten or twelve stone hanging on to the bit."

"But I didn't expect or want him to leap," protested Gerald, indignantly. "I could see the brute was running away, and I simply tried to stop him."

"Which you did most effectually," interrupted Kate; "you've stopped him for a week or more, right in the middle of the hunting season." She was trying, not very successfully, to arrange her hair, and Gerald's indignant glance was lost upon her. "Oh dear," she continued. "What am I to do with this unruly wig of mine. I must have strewn every foot of the road from this to Ballymulvey with hairpins. What can't be cured must be endured," and with a shake of the head she suffered the glorious tresses to flow free again. "A pretty guy I'll look when I get home."

Gerald knew Kate Fetherstone by name perfectly well, and he had little doubt she would be equally familiar with his, but the manner in which she had received his bit of knight errantry had not pleased him, and he was in no haste to disclose his identity. This was his first visit to his boyhood's home since he had left it some eighteen years before, and at that time Miss Fetherstone had no doubt been at

school. At any rate, she had not then adorned the neighbourhood of Liscarrick. So he simply raised his hat, expressed, with the air of a casual stranger, his pleasure that she had escaped unhurt, and prepared to remount Moriarty's car on which Jack Whalen had already seated himself.

Miss Fetherstone perfunctorily acknowledged the salutation and then, turning to the groom, ordered him to shift the side-saddle to his own horse, and to lead Red Rover slowly and carefully home.

"But sure the crutch is broke, Miss," remonstrated Nolan, "an' the flap is split an' the stirrup twisted, an' the girth burst. Ye could no more sit on that saddle than ye could on a cracked walnut."

"So I'll have to walk home five miles," grumbled the lady. "Pleasant, in a habit and riding boots with my hair all about my ears."

Gerald could not avoid overhearing, and his chivalry, albeit hitherto so coldly received, flamed up afresh. He was off the car in a moment.

"If you would care to avail yourself of our jarvey it is very much at your service. We are close to our destination."

"You are really very kind," responded Kate, receiving this attention with far more warmth than she had shown when it was a mere question of saving her life. "It's more than good of you, but—what will you do? You have luggage? What's to become of it?"

"It can stay where it is. Moriarty will bring

it to Liscarrick when you have done with him."

"Are you going to Liscarrick?" she cried with unmistakeable interest. "Are you, I believe you must be—Uncle Gerald."

"From the point of view of Bob and Molly that is my style and title," answered Gerald smiling.

"I have heard so much of you," she cried eagerly. "Molly is my very greatest friend. I am Miss Fetherstone, you know, of the Priory. You'll have heard of me?"

"Constantly," he answered. "Molly's letters are full of you."

"What an extraordinary meeting," she exclaimed. "Fancy our coming across each other in this unexpected way and you throwing Red Rover down. Have you ever done that sort of thing in California?"

She did not wait for an answer, but ran on:

"Did they expect you? I saw Mrs. Delaney only yesterday, and she said nothing about your coming."

"They know I am in Europe," answered Gerald. "Indeed, I've been in London for ten days—I and——" he looked round for his friend, meaning to introduce him, but Whalen was on the other side of the car and he could not catch his eye. "No, I told them not to expect me till they see me. But I'm home at last," he ended with a little laugh. "I left the dear old place at twenty and I'm going back to look at it with the eyes of eight and thirty."

"And I'm detaining you," said Kate, "It's

bad enough to take up your jarvey without taking up your time."

"We're just at the gate," Gerald answered as he seated her on the car and tucked his rug under her feet. "You're quite sure you're not hurt or—or frightened?"

She smiled brightly in reply. "You must be used to very timid people in California. Tell Molly I'm coming back to tea just as soon as I can get out of this dirty tattered habit. I'll send Moriarty home and drive over myself with your traps."

She turned to the driver. "To the Priory, Moriarty," she commanded, "and do try to rise a trot or we'll be all day on the road."

Gerald stood gazing after the receding car till he was roused by Jack Whalen's voice.

"Well, we've got to foot it, it appears. You know the way, I suppose?"

"Blindfold!" the other replied. "It's no distance anyhow." Then, as they walked, he continued:

"Why did you keep in the background so? You're not usually so bashful. I wanted to introduce you."

"I didn't care to spoil sport," Jack answered. "I saw the fair equestrienne had made an impression. As for the introduction I'll attend to that myself. She's coming to tea, and I bet you I call her 'Kate' to her face at our first meeting."

"Kate," repeated Gerald musingly. "So it is. I had forgotten her name was Kate. How came you to know it?"

"Because we're first cousins, my boy, though we never met in our lives before." Then, answering the other's look of astonishment, Jack continued: "Yes, old Mike Whalen, distiller of the famous Shamrock blend of whisky, was grandfather to both of us, though I'm a working journalist in 'Frisco and she's a Princess, or something like it in Ireland. I'll tell you the whole story some time. Is this Liscarrick? What a stunning entrance!"

"Yes," replied Gerald, somewhat sadly. "The remains of vanished splendour," and he led the way up the broad avenue whose every tree was linked in his mind with some boyish memory.

CHAPTER II.

GERALD DELANEY'S HOME-COMING.

MOLLY Delaney sat in the window of the library at Liscarrick catching the last of the fading light on a tea cloth, whose many worn places she was doing her best to darn. She was singing softly to herself as she wrought, for though her life had little to brighten it, the spirits of an Irish girl of twenty are not easily damped, and the shadow of dreams half dreamed were lurking in the depths of her soft blue eyes. Dreams never to be realised, perhaps, for who ever came to Liscarrick save duns, while all the sordid cares of contrivance and management fell, as they had fallen before she had left the schoolroom, on those young shoulders.

"Well nurse, what is it now?" she exclaimed, looking up from her work as an old woman entered. This was Mrs. Kilkelly who had nursed Molly and her brother, and their father before them, and who, with a couple of country wenches in training as maid servants, and a superannuated butler, constituted the sole domestic staff of the Delaneys.

"Sorra bit of good at all at all can I get out of Judy, Miss Molly," the old woman grumbled. "She has me destroyed entirely listening to her, so I just gave her a fig to put to her jaw

and towld her to lie down out o' that an lave me way."

"Good gracious! You don't mean to tell me she has toothache again," exclaimed Molly, still stitching industriously.

"Agen, is it? Sure is she ever without it?"

"I hope so for her own sake," answered Molly laughing. "But it's really terribly inconvenient—to-day of all days. Of course, I'm sorry for the girl's toothache, and all that, but the hounds meet at Tullymaine to-day, and Bob's safe to bring some of them in to tea."

"To-day, is it?" shrieked Mrs. Kilkelly, quite understanding that it was not some of the hounds but some of the hunters whose company might be expected. "To-day, is it? Well, I've med a nice hot cake, an' I'll bring in tay meself, wid the help of Larry."

"Nurse, you're a brick," cried Molly. "We'll be all right, and I don't suppose there'll be more than two or three extra—maybe none at all."

"Maybe not, Miss; sure God's good,' assented Mrs. Kilkelly as she turned to go. She was a bulky woman, and moved slowly. As she reached the door she stopped. "Musha, but I was forgetting the very thing I kem for. Here's yer pound, Miss—leastways, what's left of it. Ah, many's the time I've said—spend a penny out of a sovereign, an' it'll never be a sovereign agen."

"Couldn't you get any eggs at all?" inquired Molly anxiously.

"Only a few, miss. The hens take no

interest at all in anything in Advent. A body would think it was Christians they were. Billy Paddy come to the dure an' I tuk what he had."

The girl told over her change with a lengthening face.

"Sixteen and tuppence! Three and ten for eggs. There, put it on the mantel piece, nurse, and here's your tea cloth. It's the best I can do with it."

As Molly rose, her chair subsided sharply and unexpectedly to one side, and it needed an active spring, which she emphasised with a little scream, to save her from falling. She looked ruefully down at the chair, which was reposing in a drunken attitude on three legs of normal length and one considerably shorter.

"Bother take this chair," she cried impatiently, then, stooping to inspect the cause of the upset, continued: "A cork! Well, what next? Fancy putting a cork to prop the short leg. Where's that boot heel?"

"Oh, the dear Lord knows. Judy done out the room this morning, and she's herself," lamented Mrs. Kilkelly, as she slowly and laboriously got down on her knees and searched under table and sofa for the missing makeshift. Molly joined in the quest, and as she moved chairs and lifted rugs the condition of some of the furniture moved her to inquire:

"Did this leg ever have a castor like the other three?"

"Ah, that was afore your time, Miss Molly," panted Mrs. Kilkelly. "Your Uncle, Master Gerald, tuk that castor to make a wheel for his

little cannon, an' sorra one has ever seen it since."

"Then, considering how rich uncle Gerald is, I wouldn't thank him to give us a new chair."

This fiction of Gerald's wealth was a very vivid reality to the young Delaneys, who had spoken so long and so often of their rich uncle in California that it had come to be accepted in the neighbourhood as a well established fact. Indeed, to most people, it seemed the most natural thing in the world. A young man had gone out to America to make his fortune and had made it. The marvel would have been had he done otherwise. Many a young fellow had left Drine, setting his face westward, and had achieved what passed, in this unenlightened and poverty-stricken district, for fame and fortune. All Americans were rich. This was an axiom which no one doubted. Everyone who went to America grew rich in time. Plenty of instances could be quoted. Those who failed sank out of sight and were never heard of. So nurse accepted Molly's reference to Gerald's wealth without cavil or question.

"A new chair, miss! It's a new set of furniture he'd be afther sending if he thought it would plaze ye. A freer handed young gentleman than Master Gerald never scattered goold and silver."

"A whole new set! Can such things be?" mused Molly wistfully, as she disposed a sofa cushion so as to conceal a wofully worn patch in the saving cover. "Was this furniture *ever* new?"

"Glory be—here's the boot heel!" cried Mrs. Kilkelly exultantly. "The untidy sthreel, to go an' stick it in under the ottoman like that." She proceeded to adjust the time honoured prop under the leg of the chair, to which it gave just the requisite height and stability, and then turned to resume her conversation with Molly. "I niver mind the day when this was what ye'd call all out *new*," she said, embracing the contents of the room with a comprehensive gesture; "It was better in ways—like that castor, but I niver mind its being so good that there wasn't a chance for cleverness and contrivance."

"Cleverness and contrivance!" repeated Molly. "That's what we live on here! I suppose it will always be so." She smothered a sigh and spoke more briskly. "Time's getting on, nurse. Is tea all ready to come up if anyone arrives?"

"Maybe ye'd slip down to the dairy, Miss, an' skim a sup of cream for the tay. What between Judy an' me cake, I haven't a minute."

"All right, nurse; you cut along. I'll see to it. Oh, by the way, I suppose there's nothing but the cold mutton for dinner?"

As she spoke Molly was moving round the room, straightening a saving-cover here, removing a speck of dust there, and generally endeavouring to make the place look what she would call "a little more presentable."

"I cud make a hash of the mutton sure," answered Mrs. Kilkelly. "Och, well I remember the time when a score might drop in for dinner at Liscarrick all unbeknownst, an' ate

and drink of the best—lashins an' lavins of it—"

"I hate to hear that kind of talk," interrupted Molly. "If there had been less of that in the good old times, as you call them, there'd be more for us to-day. Now nurse, I'm off to the dairy!"

"An' I've that much to do I dunno what to lay me hand to first," said Mrs. Kilkelly, pausing, nevertheless, to cast a glance out of the window. She drew back in consternation.

"Miss Molly, Miss Molly alannah, there's two gintlemen walking up the avenue."

"Strangers?" queried Molly, tiptoeing to the window.

"I niver seen either of them afore."

"Nor I. I'm off to the dairy, nurse. Say there's no one in. I don't know where Mamma is, and Bob's out anyhow." And Molly made for the door.

"But Miss Molly. Sure I dunno, maybe they've come a long way. Ought I ax them stay an' have a bit of dinner?"

"If you dare. Do you want to disgrace the house when you know there's nothing but hashed mutton! Now, Nurse! I leave it to your native tact to deal with the situation." And Molly fled.

"Glory be!" ejaculated the old woman, wringing her hands. "What'll I do at all, at all? If they've come for a visit—an' the misthress has no more head nor a hen. Sure God's good. Maybe they've med a mistake!"

The sonorous peal of the door bell echoed through the house, and Mrs. Kilkelly waddled

out into the hall, there encountering Larry, the butler, on his way to answer the summons.

"I dunno who it is, Larry. Two gentlemen! Be sure ye find out their names!"

Jack happened to be foremost as Larry opened the door.

"Is Mrs. Delaney at home?" he inquired in the tone and manner of an afternoon caller.

Larry only stared. Mrs. Kilkelly came forward.

"I—I don't rightly know, Sir," and then, in a swift aside to Larry, she added: "Did ye ax them their names?"

"Sure, I didn't like," replied the butler, deprecatingly.

"Ah, ye beauty!" whispered Mrs. Kilkelly vindictively. "It's a pity yer mother hadn't twins of ye."

Gerald, who had recognised the two old servants at a glance, realised that he had grown out of their recollection. As he advanced with assured step into the hall, both were plainly nonplussed.

"The misthress is expectin' ye, maybe, sir?" ventured Mrs. Kilkelly.

"I don't think so."

A pause ensued which Gerald, alone of the company, seemed to enjoy. Nevertheless, he was the first to break it.

"I suppose you have other rooms here besides this hall?"

"Other—other rooms, is it?" Mrs. Kilkelly nearly choked in her indignation. "Larry, show these gentlemen into the back drawing-

room—leastways, I suppose they are gentlemen," she added in a purposely audible aside, "but the Lord alone knows. Miss Molly'll be here presently," continued the old woman, following the travellers into the room. "She's below in the—she's at the present time—she's down——"

But Larry, who was quite aware of Molly's occupation at the moment, and who had no idea of allowing nurse to dim the glories of Liscarrick by any unguarded admissions, covered his fellow servant's confusion.

"Miss Molly's at the meet of the foxhounds at Tullymaine at this present—ridin' out wid her groom."

"Yes, sir," exclaimed nurse, quick to adopt the hint and improve upon it. "I seen her ridin' off; she was wearin' her grand new habit from Dublin."

"An' a hat wid a cockade," added Larry, not to be outdone.

"Will ye whist wid yer cockade—that was the groom."

"Av' course it was the groom," confirmed the unabashed Larry. "Would Miss Delaney, of Liscarrick, wear the like?"

Mrs. Kilkelly resumed her explanation.

"An' the misthress is lyin' down wid a severe headache. An' Master Bob—his honour, I mane—is out wid the hounds. If it was a thing they'd been expectin' yez, gentlemen, sure they'd have left orders; but maybe yer honours would be plazed to take a cup of tay, or a small drop of whisky and water afore drivin' further."

"That's the cold kick out," whispered Jack. "What about your Irish welcome now, eh? I've had warmer."

"Just note the transformation," answered Gerald in the same tone, and he turned to Mrs. Kilkelly. "I should like a cup of tea, nurse, and some of that potato cake of yours, if you haven't lost the secret."

The two servants exchanged glances of amazement—almost of consternation.

"Glory be," exclaimed nurse; "he mustn't be right. How did he know I med one this very day."

"Guessed it, tho' I haven't tasted one for eighteen years," cried Gerald, heartily. "Why, nurse, is it possible you have forgotten Master Gerald?"

The poor old thing fell into such a flutter of agitation and delight that Gerald would have apologised for his mystification if he could have stemmed the torrent of her welcome. Shaking and crooning in her excitement she fitted on her spectacles and came close to him, peering into his face, and pouring forth exclamations and blessings:

"Mother of mercy! It's Master Gerald; it's Master Gerald himself, that I carried in these arms when he wasn't the height of a candle. Oh, God's good, God's good! He was the swatest child of all the childher ever I nursed an' he's come back to us, a fine grand gentleman. Ah, me boy, me beautiful boy!"

She broke off to seize his hand and cover it with kisses, while the tears rolled unheeded

down her wrinkled cheeks. Gerald bent down and kissed the old woman, but her emotion was not to be checked.

She stepped back, weeping and shaking, and stood with clasped hands raised as though in prayer or blessing, and with her streaming eyes fixed on her nurseling's face.

Larry, who had been eagerly awaiting his turn, stepped forward and wrung Gerald's hand. Though earnest enough, there was something quaint in the old fellow's manner which changed the atmosphere from tears to smiles with the quickness of an April day.

"It's welcome home, ye are, yer honour, an' now I hope you've come to live among us and that ye'll bring a beautiful lady to Liscarrick that'll hand down the name of Delaney to all posterity. Musha, but I'd have walked barefoot to Dublin to see this day."

"And yet you didn't know me, Larry," said Gerald smiling.

"Know ye!" cried Larry with conviction, "sure I'd know yer honour if I met ye blindfold in the black midnight."

"So I perceived," said Gerald drily. "And this is my friend Mr. Jack Whalen, Larry, who has come with me all the way from California."

"He's a fine young gentleman, yer honour," remarked Larry with ready politeness, "an' very light complected to come from them parts. Sure I thought they was all naygurs out there."

"Mr. Whalen is an Irishman too; half Irish, at any rate," answered Gerald.

"Musha, but half Irish is a good mixture, even if the other half was nothing better nor water. Yer sarvint, sir," he added, with a duck of the head in Jack's direction; "Whalen's a name highly thought of in these parts, an' Whalen's Shamrock Blend has given me many a sore head afore this day."

"Where's everybody? Where's the mistress, nurse," Gerald asked.

"She's above in her room dressing, sir. But I'll tell Miss Molly you're here," added the old woman moving towards the door.

"You mean, you'll tell her when she returns from hunting," suggested Gerald slyly.

"Ah, go on out of that! Ye know rightly." And Mrs. Kilkelly, all traces of recent tears banished from her smiling face, ambled forth on her errand.

"Ah, yer honour," cried Larry in reminiscent mood, "there'll be grand doings now we have yourself home agen. D'ye mind the day when your brother—may his soul be in glory this day—give the big dance after Mr. Bob was born."

"I remember it well, Larry; but I don't think you were in a condition to recall it accurately."

"Deed then I mind it all punctually. There was a big cask of porther an' a smaller one of whisky 'ithout in the yard, an' a tin cup tied to the bunghole. No questions axed but help yerself, an' bonfires all down the avenue, an' thriumphant arches, and not a man went to bed sober that night in the Barony of Liscarrick."

"Such, Jack, were our simple rural joys," observed Gerald.

"Ah," wailed Larry, "if we'd only got the wind of the word yerself was comin', we'd have had the whole Barony at the gates, an' the arches an' all."

"Including the whisky and the porter and the drunken men? I don't doubt it. You see, Jack, there was method in my madness when I declined to name a day for our arrival." And as Larry withdrew, Gerald continued. "Well, what do you think of it all?"

"I think it's a dear old place," answered Jack with enthusiasm.

"I suppose it is—at least to me. It is just as I left it. Nothing ever changes here. Even nurse and Larry don't seem a day older. The furniture—the very nick-nacks are the same. Things get broken but they don't get mended or replaced." He lifted an armchair and peeped under it. "I thought so. I stole a castor off that chair to rig up a toy cannon when I was eleven, and someone replaced it with a boot heel. Behold it! That clock on the mantel has pointed to nine minutes past seven as long as I can remember."

As they stood amused and wondering there was a rustle of draperies, and Molly paused in the doorway.

She looked from one to the other. She had been told her uncle Gerald was in the library, but here were two men, both equally strangers to her, and she knew not which to greet. She had run all the way from the dairy, through

the labyrinth of stone passages that led from the front of Liscarrick to its spacious back offices, ready with the warmest of welcomes and perchance a kiss for her uncle Gerald. Now, checked in her impulse, she halted on the threshold, uncertain whether to advance or retire. There was a slight flush on her cheeks, she was breathing a little quickly, and felt uncomfortably conscious of the long apron she had tied over her blue frock and had not stopped to remove. So standing, she made a charming picture, and so thought both of the men who were privileged to gaze upon it.

"Well, Molly—you are Molly, I suppose," said Gerald. "I've got home at last, you see."

"Oh, Uncle Gerald, you are welcome, welcome, welcome home. You don't know how glad I am to see you."

She ran to him and threw her arms round his neck, giving him a kiss for each "welcome."

"And so this is Molly," said Gerald, returning her warm greeting with real affection. "I mustn't call you 'Baby' any longer, I suppose."

"You'd never have known me, would you?" asked she.

"Well, considering you were rising three when I left home, a little shaver in cocktail petticoats, I can't truthfully say that I should. Now you are—let me see—eighteeen and two are—but I mustn't give a lady's age away. Molly, this is my friend, Jack Whalen. We were chums all through the Manchurian campaign, and for many a day before it. Jack, my niece, Miss Delaney."

"Welcome to Liscarrick, Mr. Whalen," said Molly, frankly extending a little hand which Jack was not slow to seize. "I hope you have come to make us a long visit."

The journalist's usually ready tongue tripped and faltered over a few phrases of commonplace acknowledgment, but he was spared further embarrassment by the appearance of Mrs. Delaney.

Molly's mother had been a pretty girl, and at five and forty she was a pretty woman still. It would be unfair to enquire how far art assisted nature in preserving her good looks, for she never appeared till late in the day, by which time her roses were always in bloom. Not very brilliant, fond of admiration, good hearted and incapable, it was easy to understand how Liscarrick, under her invertebrate sway, grew shabbier and dingier, all unnoticed by its mistress, who was constitutionally inclined to take things as they came—and leave them so.

Greetings and introductions followed as before, and presently, refreshments having been declined, Larry was summoned to show the gentlemen to their rooms. Jack was taken in charge by the garrulous old servant, but Gerald, declaring that he needed no one to show him the way, lingered a few minutes in conversation with his sister-in-law and his niece.

"Neighbourhood, my dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Delaney in answer to a remark of Gerald's. "Don't speak of it! There is none. The Boyles have gone, and so have the O'Reillys. Cecil Haviland has sold everything and gone to

Australia, and the Desmonds are living in lodgings in Boulogne, and daren't cross the channel. They write sometimes and say there is no lack of cheerful society—they call Boulogne the town of broken English. No, there's nobody left."

"There's Kate Fetherstone, mamma," put in Molly.

"Yes, there's Kate Fetherstone; a charming girl—at least, she's eight and twenty I daresay, and lives at the Priory with her companion, Mrs. Purvis, She's rich—oh, absurdly rich. She owns Whalen's Distillery, or the greater part of it—Shamrock Blend, you know. It's advertised everywhere."

"I made her acquaintance at Corragh Bridge," remarked Gerald. "She was riding and the horse fell lame, so I lent her our car. She said she'd drive over here to tea and bring our luggage."

"You walked, then?" asked Mrs. Delaney.

"Only from the gate," he replied.

"Oh, Uncle Gerald," Molly broke in, "I'm so glad you were civil and nice to her. I know you'll like her. Wait till you know her."

"I mean to," said Gerald. "And is Miss Fetherstone your only neighbour?"

"Well, there's Mr. O'Hara, a great friend of Bob's. He's a very lively and entertaining young man."

"*Mr.* O'Hara! Mamma means old Mat O'Hara's son, from Ballintubber," said Molly contemptuously.

"Mat O'Hara's son, from Ballintubber," re-

peated Gerald aghast. "You don't mean to say that he visits here."

"My dear Gerald, times have changed," explained Mrs. Delaney. "Mr. O'Hara's uncle in Australia died a couple of years ago and left him very well off."

"But Mat O'Hara's son!" objected Gerald.

"Gerald, you are so prejudiced," complained his sister-in-law.

"What sort is he? I only remember him as a bare-legged gossoon."

"Oh, he's blossomed out into a sort of squireen since he got his money," said Molly. "He rides to hounds when he's sober enough; goes to the big meetings at Leopardstown and Punchestown, and has his whisky—a good deal of it, too—down from Dublin."

"And comes to tea at Liscarrick," added Gerald. "Well, Emmie, I think I'll go and wash my hands. I can always repeat the operation after I have shaken hands with Matthew O'Hara, Esq. The pink room, I think you said? All right. I'll be down again directly."

CHAPTER III.

Mat O'Hara of Ballintubber.

During his father's life time Mat O'Hara with much distaste and under sore compulsion, had worked hard on the farm, and dreamed dreams of a future in which cattle and mangolds bore no part. When the place came to him on the old man's death he exchanged his fustian and corduroys for a smart riding suit and top boots, and quickly developed a pretty taste for whisky and horseflesh. As Molly had hinted, he attended the principal race meetings, and ordered his "groceries" in Dublin. For a time all went well, or seemed to do so, but wise old neighbours shook their heads and opined that young Mat was "making ducks and drakes of one of the purtiest farms in the county." And soon it became known that the crops on Ballintubber were mortgaged ere they had well sprouted, and the line of fine cows that had once trooped lowing each evening to the byre had dwindled to one sorry beast. In short, Mat's ruin had come within easily measurable distance, and the countryside was already preparing to attend the inevitable auction sale at Ballintubber, when the unexpected happened and, in the words of a farmer who felt defrauded of prospective bargains, "the divil stepped in to take care of his own."

Old Con O'Hara, whose personality and whose very name had faded into tradition in the county, died suddenly in Ballarat, and left young Mat heir to all his savings.

Now came a change. The fires burned bright again in the Ballintubber household; steeds of price champed their bits in the modernized stables; whisky galore once more gladdened its visitors, and Mat O'Hara, developing from an unpleasant chrysalis into a still more objectionable butterfly, managed to have himself placed on the commission of the peace, dubbed himself Esquire, and assumed all the airs—and they are not few—of an Irish Squireen.

By the way, it was from Larry that Jack Whalen, at a later date, and apropos of Mr. O'Hara, elicited the following fairly comprehensive definition of a squireen.

"A squireen, sir?" said the old man rubbing his head; "well, ye see, a squireen's not a gintleman—not but what he dresses like one; an' he's not a farmer—not but what he talks like one; he has more impidence nor an attorney an' less manners nor a chimney sweep, an' nobody thinks anything of him but himself, an' he—he just thinks he's doin' the divil an' all the whole time."

But Mat O'Hara, passing rich with his uncle's twenty thousand pounds, which local gossip magnified as usual to a fortune of a quarter million, cared for nobody or nothing, rode his horses, drank his whisky, and nourished his secret ambition of marrying into one of the

county families and becoming a "real gentleman."

It was at this period of his career that he became on intimate terms with Bob Delaney. There was some excuse for Bob. He was very young—barely one and twenty; Mat was some eight years older—and he shared the other's tastes, that for whiskey fortunately excepted. He had scarcely any other available companion, and was wholly without resources within himself. His education had been wofully neglected. He just straggled up like a weed, as too many young fellows do in the remoter parts of Ireland, well born, a good shot, a dashing rider, and—nothing else.

It was about twelve months after O'Hara's accession to fortune and nearly half as many before Gerald's return, that a conversation was held in the too hospitable parlour at Ballintubber, the consequences of which were destined to entail serious trouble and perplexity to the family at Liscarrick.

Bob Delaney had ridden over to consult his friend, whose superior age and "knowingness" he still held in much respect, on some question connected with an ailing spaniel. The two were seated at the stout oaken table in O'Hara's only sitting room, discussing steaming tumblers of whisky punch while their talk ranged over many topics.

The furniture was heavy and old-fashioned, such as may be found in many an Irish farmhouse of the better class. This was all unchanged since the old man's day. Unchanged,

too, was the carpet, now ragged and inexpressibly dirty. Mat O'Hara had, so far, brought no neat handed Phyllis to reign at Ballintubber.

"I was up in town last Thursday," Mat was saying, "an' I had another look at that colt of Flannagan's. May I niver ate another bit if there's the like of him in the three counties."

"Remember, it was I saw him first," cried Bob, eagerly.

"Who's denying it? I always said ye had a good eye for a horse, youngster an' all as ye are; but a throughbred's a thing I like to look at wid me own eyes—especially when the price runs into four figures."

"Four figures," repeated Bob, aghast.

"Divil a lie in it. Two thousand he was axing—guineas at that, an' I bet him down to sixteen hundred pounds an' a tenner back for luck. Lower than that he won't go, an' I don't blame him. Look at the breeding of him! By Firefly out of an Oaks winner. Why, it's a gift, I call it. He'll win his own money in stakes afore he's a four year old."

At this tempting prospect Bob's eyes glistened.

"Why don't you buy him, Mat? You ought."

"I mean to, but I'm not forgettin' 'twas you found him. Ye ought to be in this, Bob, by G—d you ought."

Bob pondered. The idea dazzled him, but he knew too well that eight hundred pounds was a sum beyond him.

"You're a real decent chap, Mat," he said,

at last, "but it's no go. I could no more find the half of sixteen hundred pounds than I could pay the National Debt. Buy the horse, old fellow, run him; let me stand in twenty or a hundred, or whatever I can raise on his first certainty, and you won't owe me anything."

"Look at here, Bob—but first fill your naggin, the materials are at yer elbow. Help yerself an' pass the bottle."

Then, when the glasses were replenished, O'Hara resumed. "Ye don't know what a good thing you're missing. Wait till I tell ye. Ye may belave I didn't have all that ould chat with Flannagan without getting something out of him. He said, sez he—this was at the latther end of the discoorse when I had him bet down as far as he'd go—'Well, take him at yer own price, Misther O'Hara; I know ye'll trate the little harse well an' run him straight, an' if I didn't I wouldn't sell him for twiced the money. His dam niver was beat at anything like fair weights, an' no more was his sire. There's been good ones bred out of that pair, but niver the aquil of this one, an' its a fortin' I'm offering ye this day—take it or lave it.'"

"What's the good of telling me all this?" said Bob, fretfully. "I believe in the horse as much as you do, or Flannigan either; but I tell you I haven't a hundred pounds—no nor ten, to sport at the present moment."

"Don't let that stop you," cried the host, draining his tumbler. "Mat O'Hara's no half-way friend. Here's yer chance, and may I niver ate another bit if I'm going to let ye miss

it. I'll buy the little harse; sure I've plinty, an' if ye haven't the dirty coppers in yer pocket this minnit, sure it won't always be so, plaze God. You shall have your half in the ventur an' ye'll give me your note for eight hundred at whatever interest ye think right, and be jabers I can't say fairer nor that."

"Do you mean it, Mat?" shouted Bob with heightening colour and sparkling eyes.

"Mat O'Hara's word is his bond," replied the other, replenishing his glass. "We'll go into 'Torney McMaster an' get the papers drawn up—not but what I hate the like between gentlemen, but sure what can we do? An' we'll just step in at Liscarrick on the way back an' wet the bargain."

This last suggestion gave young Delaney pause. Enthusiastic as he was at the prospect of becoming part owner of "the little harse," and flushed with a quite unusual quantity of whiskey punch, he could not but remember that O'Hara had never yet set foot within the mansion of Liscarrick as a guest, and he had grave misgivings as to his mother's and sister's views of such an introduction. But in the good fellowship of the moment, and still glowing with a sense of his host's unexpected generosity it was difficult to frame a plausible excuse. So there was only a moment's pause before he replied, with a fair assumption of cordiality.

"That we will; wet it with the best in the house, and drink the colt's health into the bargain."

"More power to ye," cried Mat. "To-

morrow's a go, and as we'll drink his health in good ould liquor in the good ould house, begorra, we'll christen him after it. The colt shall be called 'Liscarrick,' an' shall run in the colours of Robert Delaney and Matthew O'Hara, Esquires, an' if he doesn't pull off Punchestown next spring, call me a leprechaun."

The colt's health was toasted in his native liquor as they called it, and Mat saw his friend safely mounted and started on his homeward road.

Then he returned to the house and thought over what he had done.

Mat O'Hara did not lack cunning, and tho' eight hundred pounds was a stiff price to pay, he did not grudge it. For the entrée at Liscarrick meant to him the first step on the ladder of his lofty ambition. And, of course, if the worst came to the worst, Robert Delaney was still good, under legal pressure if necessary, for such a comparatively trifling amount.

And as Bob rode homeward through the gathering dusk his brain was aglow with ecstatic visions. He saw the crowded race course; he saw the gay jackets of the jockeys; he heard the thunder of the flying hoofs as the horses flashed by. And louder than all, gathering in volume as a dark chestnut drew further and further ahead, he heard the swelling cry from a thousand throats—"Liscarrick! Liscarrick! Liscarrick wins!"

He fancied that he was himself riding the winner to triumph and pressed his pony on in a

wild gallop through the gloom. But he drew rein as he passed the gates and jogged up the avenue soberly enough. The eight hundred pound bill he was ready and willing to sign, at any date and bearing any interest. Bob was but twenty-one, and at no period of life had any of his blood been remarkable for prudence. But there was another condition attached to his bargain, and how was his mother likely to receive such a guest as Mat O'Hara.

After all, he need not have troubled himself on this score. Mrs. Delaney felt her life too lonely to be over particular. A handsome, well-set-up young man like O'Hara—and in these respects nature had been prodigal in her gifts to the Squireen—could not fail to waken interest of one kind or another in the mind of an idle, foolish woman. She knew Mat by appearance and by common repute. She knew he was a wild, harum-scarum fellow, much given to dogs and horses, but she had never happened to hear that he was a harder drinker than ordinary, and of any darker episodes in his life she was completely ignorant. It was from Molly that the chief objection to the proposed introduction arose, and she was vehement and outspoken in her criticisms.

"Mat O'Hara!" she cried. "I wonder at you, Bob. I should think Papa would turn in his grave if he were here listening to you now."

In her excitement Molly ignored the limitations of time and space, but her meaning was clear enough.

"Molly, dear, control yourself," urged her

mother. "Who is there in this desert to know or care whom we receive?"

"I care," said Molly doggedly.

"Hang it, Molly, he's a friend of mine," cried Bob.

"More shame for you," answered the girl.

"Mr. O'Hara is very well off since his uncle died, and he is *such* a handsome man," pursued Mrs. Delaney.

"Mamma, dear, can't you see?" cried Molly impatiently. "Even if the creature were a gentleman, which he's not and never will be, he's no business here. We are two women living in this great place, and we must be careful whom we receive. It isn't as if there were a man in the house."

"I'm here," asserted Bob.

"Oh you! It's you've brought this on us! You're only a brat of a boy," ejaculated Molly contemptuously,—a reply which reduced her brother to speechless indignation and left him feeling helplessly for that dilatory moustache.

"Your Uncle Gerald talks of paying us a visit as soon as he can get away from this wretched war," observed Mrs. Delaney, on whom Molly's last argument had produced some impression. "I hope he'll make a good long stay when he comes."

"So do I," echoed Molly; "someone's badly wanted here. Everything's at sixes and sevens. I wonder what he'll say when he finds Mat O'Hara's clodhopping feet under his brother's dining table."

"Hold your tongue, Molly!" cried Bob angrily.

But Molly's Irish temper was all aflame.

"He's nothing but a low, drunken squireen. I pray night and morning that Uncle Gerald may come, and come soon. I think I can picture the reception he will give Mat O'Hara."

And with flaming cheeks and shining eyes, Molly flounced out of the room.

Bob looked at his mother, and his mother looked at Bob. The latter shrugged his shoulders, lit one of the cheap cigars he affected, and observed:

"Here's the deuce and all of a ruction all about nothing. Wait till Molly gets to know Mat. She'll find he's just as good a sort as the next one."

But Molly did not make the acquaintance of the owner of Ballintubber on this occasion. She had ordered the pony trap, gone to her room to pack her bag, and within half an hour was well on her way to the Priory, where she had a standing invitation to come as often and stay as long as she pleased.

CHAPTER IV.

Sanctuary.

The style and scale of living at the Priory afforded a marked contrast to that prevailing at Liscarrick. At Miss Fetherstone's home wealth and luxury had done much to smooth the asperities of life in an Irish western county. Soft piled carpets caressed the foot; easy chairs and lounges, with no ingenious boot heel or cork to simulate a false security, invited repose; a bountiful table and well trained servants were there to welcome the visitor, and the whole ménage moved on its well-oiled wheels with a smoothness that soothed like a rest-cure the jangled nerves of poor harassed Molly.

She entered the morning room, where Kate Fetherstone was sitting with her friend and companion, Mrs. Purvis, as abruptly and tempestuously as a whirlwind, for the five miles' drive had not been quite long enough to wholly calm her impetuous temper.

"Why, Molly dear, how late you are," said Kate rising and kissing her. "Have you had tea?"

Mrs. Purvis had risen too, and her hand was on the bell.

"Bother tea," cried outspoken Molly. "Oh,

I beg your pardon. I don't care about any. Don't trouble, Mrs. Purvis, please. I've brought my bag, Kate, and I'm going to stay the night.

"For more than the night, I hope," spoke Kate, heartily. "You know it's a real pleasure to me to have you whenever I can get you. What good wind blew you over?"

"Oh, I just thought I'd come," answered Molly, awkwardly, with a glance at Mrs. Purvis. "I'll tell you all about it by and bye."

"Would you be so very kind as to give orders about Molly's room," said Miss Fetherstone, addressing her companon, "and you might send in tea. I'm always ready for a cup, and I'm sure it will do the child good after her cold drive. Now dear," she went on when Mrs. Purvis had left the room, "tell me all about it. What's up?"

"Oh they do drive me half crazy at home," said Molly, swaying forward in her chair and clasping her knees in her hands. "Bob's such a bear and Mamma—well, Mamma's so impossible. You'll never guess their latest. Bob has asked Mat O'Hara to lunch or something, and Mamma backs him up."

"Is that all?" asked Kate laughing. "I'd like to meet this Mr. O'Hara. I've heard a lot of him. I wonder, if I met him and were very nice to him, would he ask me to tea at Ballintubber."

"Kate, how can you?" cried Molly impulsively. "Why, he's a perfectly horrid man; he's drunk more than half his time, and he was

in a scandalous breach of promise case a few months ago, and found guilty, and had to pay damages. It was in all the papers."

"I know he is not a very desirable person," said Kate, more gravely; "but Molly, dear, you mustn't be unreasonable. The man has means and a certain sort of position; he's bound to find his way, sooner or later, into the few good houses that remain open in these parts, and Bob has chosen to make a friend of him. You can't fight your mother and brother single handed. Make the best of it."

"It's easy for you to talk," wailed the girl. "You have everything you want, and are your own mistress. Do you know, to me one of the standing marvels of life is, why you are content to live in this God forsaken country at all."

"Do you know why," answered Kate earnestly. "Because I feel safe here—safe and at peace. Molly, I've had my taste of fashion and the great world, and I didn't like them. I spent a season or two in London with my sister; she brought me out, I went everywhere, saw everything——"

"And didn't like it?" queried Molly, amazed.

"I hated it," and in answer to the younger girl's look of surprise, Kate went on. "Yes, I hated it, and you'd hate it too. You wouldn't like to be sought for what you have, not for what you are; to feel that any attention you might receive was offered to your money—not to yourself."

"Kate, dear, what a horrid feeling," said Molly with a little shiver.

"Quite inevitable, though. Yes, it is," insisted Kate as Molly shook her head. "In one London season I had six proposals."

"I don't wonder at it," rejoined Molly, gazing with unfeigned admiration at her friend, whose handsome face looked at the moment as bright and animated as Molly's own, and almost as young.

"It was my money, dear, not myself they wanted. Yes, I had six proposals—not counting nibbles, and they were all as poor as church mice."

"And you refused them all," quoth Molly breathless.

"I did, more or less adroitly; one improves with practice," answered Kate bitterly. "There was one of them I almost accepted."

"You were in love with him?" Molly asked quickly. She adored these confidences, and her own troubles were for the moment forgotten.

"I can't quite say that, but I despised him less than the others. He was a Viscount, and he really made love rather nicely. I never doubted that he found his inspiration in my person, not my purse. We women are such fools sometimes."

"And did you——?"

"I did not; simply because I chanced to hear part of a conversation between his mother and his aunt, which was assuredly never meant for my ears. Mamma said: "I am so glad that there is a prospect of dear Valentine settling down at last—a good match, too, as far as money goes.

He tells me he only has to ask and to have."

"Oh Kate, she never could have meant you!"

"Wait till I quote Auntie. 'I suppose it is that wild Irish girl, Lady Charlton's sister? I trust there is no doubt about the money my dear! To which Mamma replied, 'Oh, Valentine has assured himself on that point. It's whisky, you know, Irish whisky. But there will be no odour of the still upon the sovereigns."

"Kate!" gasped Molly, horrified.

"Ah, Molly, you don't know your luck. You haven't a sixpence, and you can only be wooed for your own sweet self. I'd like to go out, a beggar maid, and stand in the market place, so that I could be sure I was chosen for myself."

"I'm sure if I were a man——" began Molly eagerly, but the other interrupted her.

"But, you see, you're not; so I shall have to die an old maid—when I'd a great deal rather be wooed, and won, and kissed, and married—as you will be one of these fine days, Molly, dear."

"Nonsense!" said Molly, rising with a crimson face. "There isn't a man I'd have, and well you know it. Here's tea," she continued, as Bishop, the butler, entered with the tray. "How good you are to me, Kate," you fairly spoil me."

"Shut up and drink your tea," laughed Kate. "There now, you look comfey, and here comes Mrs. Purvis. She has had hers, and so have I, but we're always game for a second innings—aren't we Mrs. Purvis?"

The conversation became general, and Miss

Fetherstone's peculiar and somewhat morbid views on money and marriage were not further discussed. It was not the first time that she had touched on these topics in intimate chat with her young friend, but Molly had never before found her so outspoken—and so bitter.

Dress, servants, and the weather had been duly mentioned and criticised, and the three ladies had fallen silent, momentarily expecting the dressing gong, when Kate suddenly said:

"It can't be very comfortable for you at home, Molly, while this nightmare is hanging over you. I'll drive over to-morrow and have it out with Mrs. Delaney, and if she won't hear reason I'll keep you here permanently. After all, your views, or your prejudices if they like to call them so, are entitled to some consideration in your own home."

"Thanks, dear, but it wouldn't do an atom of good. I'm only a baby there unless there is something to do or contrive or to manage. Then I might be fifty."

"But you can't fight your battle single handed," replied Kate. "When is your uncle coming home?"

"I don't know. He talks of it in every letter. He says he means to come directly this war will let him."

"But your uncle is his own master," urged Kate. "He's a rich man, isn't he?"

"I suppose so," replied Molly, "at least—yes—he must be. He owns a gold mine in California you know, and he's always sending us home things. He sent me fifty pounds to

buy my dress when I was presented, and he sent Bob fifty at the same time—on general principles he said, and he gave me a pendant—I shall wear it at dinner, its a specimen out of one of his own mines."

"Indeed," remarked Kate. "I shall have to cultivate your uncle Gerald. But why can't he come home and fight his pretty niece's battles?"

"Because he's in China, looking on at other people's," laughed Molly. "He's reporting the war for his newspaper. He began life as a journalist, and likes it."

"Well, I think he's wanted here——" began Kate, and Molly broke in with a fervent, "You'll never know how much!"

"And till he comes I'll try to take his place," resumed Miss Fetherstone, "for I won't see my particular pet put upon! What a lot of p's," she laughed, "they ought to make my mouth quite a beautiful shape. Now there's the dressing gong, so run along dear, and mind you wear Uncle Gerald's pendant. I particularly want to see it."

Dismissing Molly with a kiss, she turned to Mrs. Purvis.

"Things are going headlong to ruin at Liscarrick, I wish that Uncle of hers were here!"

To which Mrs. Purvis replied.

"My dear Kate, everyone's trouble is your trouble, and you mustn't go worrying yourself into fiddlestrings over this, for there's nothing on earth you can do."

"Well, at any rate, Molly won't have to sit

down to table with Mr. O'Hara to-morrow, since she loathes the very thought of it—and that's something anyhow."

With which parting shot Kate Fetherstone went to dress for dinner.

CHAPTER V.

The Squireen Consults His Solicitor.

Several months had elapsed since Molly's escapade before Gerald found time to visit Ireland, and during the long summer her yearning for his return became almost pathetic. She no longer rebelled, or only at infrequent intervals—but accepted O'Hara's growing intimacy at Liscarrick with sullen resignation. She disliked and dreaded the man more, if possible, than ever, but she set her teeth in the determination to endure, comforting herself by muttering, when tried over much, "Wait till Uncle Gerald comes."

Bob, too, looked forward to his uncle's arrival with similar earnestness, but for different reasons. Though of late he had seen more of Mat O'Hara than ever, the two were no longer on quite the friendly terms of old. "The little harse," as Mat affectionately styled their joint purchase, so far from proving a bond of union, threatened to turn into the equine equivalent of an apple of discord. Each of the partners held his own views on matters of diet and of exercise, and they held them strongly.

By mutual consent the animal was kept at Liscarrick, where better exercising ground and more commodious loose boxes were available;

at least so Bob urged, and his partner acquiesced, reflecting that the more plausible the excuse for his frequent visits, the better for his purpose, and frequent and more frequent these visits grew. Did the hounds meet anywhere in the neighbourhood, O'Hara dropped in to tea. Was it a non-hunting day, he walked or rode over to see "the little harse," and often remained to lunch. Molly, all her prickles out like a defensive hedgehog, scarce ever could be induced to give him a civil word, and bided her time. Mrs. Delaney was much more gracious. Her's was one of those natures which crave attention and flattery, and of the latter the Squireen was no niggard. Its quality, to be sure, was coarse, but its supply was inexhaustible, and to Mrs. Delaney this meant much.

During his visits to Liscarrick, too, he was always careful to be on his best behaviour. The whisky bottle, it is true, was always produced, and ebbed fast under his attentions, for Mat was no tea drinker, but he was a seasoned toper in whose manners and appearance a few glasses made no perceptible difference, and Mrs. Delaney was far from regarding him as a hard drinking man.

People began to gossip, and the talk went round that Mat O'Hara, of Ballintubber, was courting Miss Molly Delaney. Hints and innuendoes soon reached the ears of the young lady concerned, and did not tend to diminish her distaste for her rustic wooer. For gossip was right for once, and O'Hara first sought an introduction to Liscarrick with the fixed inten-

tion of wooing, and if possible winning the daughter of the house. Nor would the girl's uncompromising hostility have turned him from his purpose, for Mat was not easily daunted, but he was prudent as well as ambitious.

O'Hara passed for a rich man, but he knew better. He was spending his capital, and Uncle Con's snug legacy was dwindling daily. He was as firmly resolved as ever to achieve position by marriage, but might it not be possible to achieve fortune at the same time? He thought the thing feasible, and reflected. For one brief moment a dazzling vision of Miss Fetherstone, and her unnumbered thousands danced before him, only to be dismissed as impossible. He had met the ladies from the Priory more than once at Liscarrick, and he winced, albeit not thin skinned, at the remembrance of the cool, cutting phrases wherewith Miss Fetherstone had more than once put him in his place when his familiarity grew too aggressive. Poor Molly's wrath was a bludgeon, and easily parried. Kate's contempt was a rapier which cut to the bone. In attempting such a fortress he would suffer too much, and even his vanity could not persuade him that he had the forlornest hope of success.

"But I can't go on wasting me time," he pondered; "and Uncle Con's money won't last for ever."

As his unassisted musings seemed unlikely to carry him further, he drained his glass, ordered his hack, and cantered into Drine to spend "the shank of the evening" with 'Torney McMaster.

Dry, wizened, and shrewd, a Scotch Irishman from the North, Alexander McMaster loved nothing on earth so well as his bank account, and took an interest in O'Hara and his affairs partly because he had done well out of them in the past, but chiefly because he hoped to do better out of them in the future. He was ready of tongue, as quick to pounce on an advantage as a terrier on a rat, and he hated the Delaneys with all his heart, not only because they were poor, but because he more than suspected that they looked down contemptuously on the country attorney from the serene heights of their county position.

O'Hara had always been careful to conceal from the attorney, as from everyone else, his increasingly precarious financial position.

"That bond of Bob Delaney's," said Mat, crushing a refractory lump of sugar in his tumbler, "it'll be due—when?"

He had called ostensibly on this business, meaning to lead the conversation toward a more delicate topic as soon as he felt sufficiently primed.

"In another three weeks," answered the lawyer. "What do you mean to do?"

"Renew, I suppose. What else is there for it? You can't get blood out of a stone."

"I'm not so sure of that. There's a limited amount of blood to be got out of most stones if you don't mind crushing them. Liscarrick is not entailed; the estate's dipped to the eyes, but I should think the equity of redemption

would fetch a thousand or two, even under a forced sale."

"Sell up Liscarrick! An ould place like that! I couldn't do it, Mac, an' that's the truth!"

"Well, Mat, you know best. Only I can't see the object of taking the bond if you were not prepared to enforce it."

"There's another thing," said O'Hara slowly. "I'd still be out eight hundred on the deal even if Bob paid me. I'm getting out of consate wid the little harse. Bob has him at Liscarrick, and he doesn't know how to handle him. He thinks he's doin' the divil an' all, but he knows more about plough harses nor he does about blood stock."

"Well, what would you propose to do?" asked McMaster.

"Look here! I don't want to sell Bob up for reasons I'll tell ye afore I say good night. But there's more ways of killing a dog than choking him with butther. He has a rich uncle in foreign parts, hasn't he?"

"I'm afraid, Mat," replied the attorney with a dry chuckle, "that it won't do to depend on all foreign and colonial uncles showing the consideration that yours did, and dying just in the nick of time to discharge the liabilities of an embarrassed nephew."

"Ye're damned funny, ain't ye, Mr. McMaster," snarled O'Hara, who much disliked these references to the source of his fortune, "but there's been such a thing heard of as a rich millionaire sportin' a thrifle sooner nor see

his ould family seat brought to the hammer."

"Such things have been," said the lawyer cautiously, "but sentiment's not a very safe thing to reckon on; it's no security in law. Still in this case, and from what I know of the overweening pride of these Delaneys, it may answer. So you wish me to renew?"

"More nor that," shouted Mat eagerly. "Here's my idea. Let him renew for another few months—give me a new bond for the whole sixteen hundred, adding the interest due, and I'll sell him the whole harse, lock, stock and barrel, an' let him get up on him and ride him to the divil his own way."

"H'm," mused the attorney. "Trusting to the Californian uncle to take up the bond at maturity?"

"He'll do it," cried O'Hara eagerly. "I know the store they all set by the ould place, an' what's sixteen hundred pounds to the likes of him, wid his goold mines an' his newspapers an' the divil knows what else besides. An' he's coming home this year. They do be talking of it all the time up at the big house. They don't know the day he may walk in."

"Well, I'm only here to follow your instructions, Mr. O'Hara," said the lawyer formally. "It's your speculation, not mine. By the way, will the young man be willing to purchase your interest on those terms, and give his bond for the increased amount?"

"Will a duck swim?" answered Mat with a prodigious wink. "He'd be willing to do anything for anyone who wouldn't ax him to put

his hand in his empty pocket, and he'd give the eyes out of his head to call the little harse his own, out an' out."

"Very good! Bring the young man to my office any day during the next three weeks, and if he's agreeable the matter can be settled off-hand."

"Now, Mac," said O'Hara, the business of the bond thus dismissed, "if there's another sup in that decanter I'll just fix meself a dock-a-dorrich, an' explain to you the reason why I don't want to be too hard on Bob Delaney just now, or on anyone of the name."

"It's like this," he went on, when he had mixed the ingredients to his satisfaction. "I think the widow Delaney has a very kindly feeling towards yours truly."

He lay back in his chair and smiled broadly in the attorney's face. The latter stared. He began to think the punch was affecting his client's brain.

"And is it on that account that you are prepared to forego your security for a debt of eight hundred pounds?"

"Not altogether. Tell me, Mac, for you must know, what's the widow's jointure?"

"Seven hundred a year; that's one of the charges on the place, and lucky for them she has it, for very little else have they to live on."

"An' its not forfeit if she married agen?" asked Mat anxiously.

"Not that I know of—no, I may say I know it is not," replied McMaster.

"Then," said the Squireen, bringing his

face close to McMaster's, "I think it's high time she was choosing her second husband, and when I tell her so, I think you'll find she'll agree with me!"

"Oh!" was all the attorney said, but his opinion of his client rose several degrees from that moment.

"An' now," said O'Hara, "if you'll just ring an' tell Darby to fetch round me pony, I think I'll be toddling. Just one parting glass afore I go, Mac, an' I'll give you a toast."

"What is it?" asked the attorney, as he filled the tumblers.

"Speed the wooing," cried O'Hara, then, draining his glass he clapped his hat on his head, shook hands with McMaster, and lurched out of the room.

CHAPTER VI.

Bob Delaney's Thoroughbred.

"There, uncle mine," cried Bob, as he flung open the door of his best loose box and stood in his horsiest attitude, chewing a straw as if to the manner born, "There, uncle, that's the thoroughbred."

Gerald had heard much of this animal since his arrival. For several days he had not been allowed to inspect him, Bob averring that "he was not looking his best," but to-day, Molly and Jack having started after breakfast for a long ramble, the young master of Liscarrick could no longer restrain his impatience, but carried his uncle off to the stables.

"Thoroughbred, eh?" commented Gerald, after he had surveyed the equine prodigy for some moments in silence. "They never were much in my line, and my stable lore has grown a trifle rusty of late years, but I certainly think he's a slashing fine youngster."

"Isn't he?" cried the other enthusiastically. "Look at those quarters. I wish you saw him gallop. Such action. And look at the hoof of him. Hard as a pebble and clean as a whistle. Never fear," he added as he dodged a playful kick, "there's not a particle of vice in

his composition; it's only high spirits."

Gerald, having paid the colt the expected compliments, strolled with his companion across the dilapidated yard and out into the neglected home farm. He saw all around him evidences of unthrift, the slow ravages of eighteen years all unrepaired, and his heart grew heavy for Liscarrick.

"What do you call him?" he asked presently, reverting to the horse.

"I've christened him 'Liscarrick,' after the old place," replied Bob. "Good name, I think."

"I hope he'll keep in better condition than his namesake, then. Everything seems going to rack and ruin here."

"I can't help it," replied Bob, rather sulkily. "I'm no farmer."

"So I should judge," responded the other dryly, and they fell silent again.

Presently, Gerald's train of thought brought him face to face with a problem which demanded solution.

"Say," he said suddenly, "How did you come by that bit of horseflesh, anyhow? He must have stood you a longish price."

"Sixteen hundred," answered Bob, who had been waiting for and rather dreading this question.

"Sixteen hundred," echoed Gerald, "and where, may I ask, did you raise sixteen hundred pounds?"

The two men had halted and were facing each other. Bob waxed deprecatory and explanatory.

"You see the deal came about in a rather funny way. I didn't go into it alone. I only took half."

"Then this is the horse deal you went into with Mat O'Hara. I don't care for your partner, but the liability is less. Still I congratulate you on having eight hundred pounds to sport in a flutter like this."

"You don't understand, Uncle Gerald. I didn't have to put up a cent. Mat found the money."

"And let you in on the ground floor for nothing!" sneered Gerald. "Upon my word, I hadn't given Mr. O'Hara credit for such generosity."

"Hang it all, don't bait a fellow," growled Bob, uneasily. "Here, I'll tell you all about it. I gave Mr. O'Hara notes for the money, of course,—eight hundred first of all, and then sixteen hundred afterwards. Sixteen hundred in all, I mean. We differed about the horse—the feeding and training, and so forth. He's an ignorant beggar, though he thinks he knows it all. Well we agreed to split the partnership, buy or sell; we tossed up for it, and it fell to me to buy, and I'm jolly glad of it, for it's a thundering good investment."

"I hope it may prove so," commented Gerald dryly.

"It's bound to. You've no idea how the colt has come on since I've had him. He'd fetch two thousand anywhere, to-morrow!"

"Then, if I were you, I'd sell him to-morrow."

"Not me," cried Bob. "Do look at the matter

sensibly, uncle. He'll come out in the spring as a three year old. He's splendidly engaged. Wait till he's won a race or two, and he'll be worth double the money."

"Supposing he loses a race or two instead?"

"He can't. Look at his pedigree. He's by——"

"Don't bother me with pedigrees," exclaimed Gerald, irritably, "I know nothing about your sires and dams, and care less. What you ought to bend your mighty intellect to is—how are you going to take up these notes. When are they due?" he asked abruptly.

"Very shortly now," said Bob soberly, "in a couple of weeks, I believe, but the understanding was——"

"I know all about these understandings. All that O'Hara will understand is that his money is due, and he'll see that he gets it."

"He'll renew," asserted the sanguine nephew.

"Will he? I'm much mistaken in the man if he does," retorted the more experienced uncle. "He found himself let into a bad speculation with a young fool for a partner, and like a smart man wriggled out of the trap. But I'll bet he's not going to leave any feathers in it if he can help it."

"Nonsense, uncle, he was readier to buy than to sell. We tossed up for it, and he lost."

"Pshaw! You make me tired!" said Gerald contemptuously. Then in a more conciliatory tone he went on. "Well, you're young; that's your only excuse. I suppose that you couldn't raise sixteen hundred anywhere?"

"Look here, uncle Gerald," said Bob, drawing a long breath and blurting out his proposition headlong fashion as he would have ridden at a big fence there was no avoiding. "Couldn't you take over this debt and settle with him. I'd pay you back out of Liscarrick's first winnings."

Gerald regarded the speaker with amazement. "And where do you suppose I'd get sixteen hundred pounds?"

"Where?" echoed Bob, equally astonished. "Why, you're a millionaire, aren't you?"

"I, a millionaire!" cried Gerald. "My dear boy, barring a few pounds at my bankers, I've nothing between me and the poorhouse but my salary. What put such a ridiculous notion into your head?"

"Everyone thinks so. You said yourself you were doing so well lately."

"So I have or I couldn't have come home. That was the war. A man that's earning twelve or fifteen pounds a week and has his salary suddenly jumped to thirty-five may be forgiven if he thinks he is doing well."

Bob's countenance had fallen lower and lower with every word his uncle uttered.

"And I've been counting so on you," he complained. "Do you mean to say you haven't got anything? What about that gold mine of yours? Is that a flam too?"

"There has been no flam about me," answered the other angrily, "except what you have been pleased to imagine for yourself. I make my own living, and don't owe a cent. in the world.

I wish to the Lord as much could be said of you."

"There's no gold mine then," said Bob in a more subdued tone. "I'm sure you said something of the kind in some of your letters, all the same."

"I did speak of a gold mine when I was sending Molly a specimen, but it was more as a joke than anything else. I'll show you the share certificates when we go in. I do own the greater part of a mine, but I'm not so sure about the gold."

"Isn't it worth anything?" inquired Bob anxiously.

"At the present it's—well—undeveloped," replied his uncle smiling slightly. "I took the shares—it was all I could lay hands on—in satisfaction for arrears of salary when the 'Daily Broker' went smash. I don't think the stuff was of much value or I shouldn't have got it."

"Pity," observed Bob. "'Gold mine' sounds so well."

"It may here, it doesn't in California. They're too much fed up with this kind of thing."

Gerald hunted through his pocket book till he found a somewhat soiled newspaper clipping, which he handed to his nephew. Bob took it eagerly and read:

"Golden Horseshoe Mine. Surface indi-
"cations are extraordinarily rich, and if the
"vein proves equal to the outcroppings, there
"ought to be a million dollars taken out in
"the next six months."

He looked up.

"Is that your mine? Well, if it is, all I can say is that it reads bang up."

"So it ought," replied Gerald, laughing, "considering I wrote it myself, and printers' ink comes cheap to the trade."

"You can't help me out then," pleaded Bob so wistfully that his uncle felt sorry for the boy. "I believe O'Hara would renew if you'd put your name on the bill. Anyhow, if you'll let me I'll sound McMaster."

"Do you mean the attorney?" asked Gerald, looking up quickly. "Surely the matter hasn't passed into his hands?"

"Well, the notes were signed at his place, and O'Hara goes a good deal by his advice. May I see him, and say you'll back the bill?"

"I don't see what value my name would have on a bill to that amount," objected Gerald, "still, if they've any fancy for my autograph, and consider it will increase their security, I'll go that far."

"You're a brick, uncle. You'll see it will come all right."

"But mind," insisted Gerald, "no sailing under false colours. Don't you go to McMaster with any fairy tales about your millionaire uncle. In the first place it wouldn't have the least effect on him, he wouldn't believe you; and in the second place, I won't have it."

"I won't say a word I oughtn't," promised Bob. "Only I shan't lead off by saying you're only on salary. He thinks you're very rich; everyone does. Let him keep on thinking so.

You needn't go out of your way to enlighten him, need you?"

"I certainly shan't go about the place proclaiming myself a pauper," answered Gerald, "but if I'm asked any questions I shan't tell any lies. I am pretty well persuaded you've been had in this deal, and if I can pull you out of the hole I will. After all," he mused, "there can be no great risk. The horse ought to be security for a good bit of the money."

"For double the money," shouted Bob enthusiastically, his spirits quite restored. "And don't forget; you promised to let me see those mining cerificates."

"Come up to my room, and you can have a look at them now."

"All right, it isn't very enticing round here," assented the boy. "Now you've seen Liscarrick there isn't anything else worth looking at. And oh, uncle mine, remember it's very important that you shouldn't go upsetting preconceived opinions. Nothing people hate like that. They're quite sure you're a Yankee millionaire. Don't go disappointing them."

"Not unless I'm asked the question, and asked by someone I consider entitled to an answer."

"By McMaster, for instance," ventured Bob.

"If I put my name on that paper of yours, yes," assented his uncle, "decidedly McMaster would be entitled to the truth, and so would O'Hara."

"I see," sighed the nephew, "I can't imagine where some people get so many silly, incon-

venient scruples. Never mind, uncle," he continued, brightening up, "I regard all that you have told me as strictly confidential, and you may rely on it I shan't give you away."

Gerald, albeit much disquieted at what he had heard, could not refrain from laughing as he led the way into the house.

CHAPTER VII.

A Shadow Falls on Liscarrick.

"Say, old fellow," remarked Jack Whalen, as he strolled with Gerald along the shrubbery path one Sunday morning a few weeks after their arrival at Liscarrick, "do you know, you've got a mighty charming little girl for a niece here?"

"I think I have," answered Gerald, regarding the speaker curiously.

"I've been studying her a good deal," went on Jack, looking about for a suitable grass blade to thrust through the stem of his pipe.

"So I have observed," remarked Gerald, puffing away contentedly.

"You can't help observing her," rejoined Jack, purposely ignoring the other's meaning. "confound it, is there anything so irritating as a pipe that won't draw? What was I saying—oh, yes. I have been observing your little niece, and I don't think she is happy at home."

"Indeed," replied Gerald, "I'm sorry to hear that."

For some days he had watched with interest and secret approval the growing pleasure which Molly and Jack seemed to take in each other's society. It would do very well, he thought. Jack, a young fellow with his foot well on the ladder, and endowed with his full share of

brains and energy; Molly, a pretty, intelligent, sweet-natured girl, and a very capable little housewife as he had not failed to observe. Jack's opening remarks seemed to hint at possible confidences, though it was certainly early days for a declaration.

"Yes," the younger man continued, filling the pipe whose initial obstinacy he had at length overcome, "I don't think she's at all happy in her present surroundings, and I'm afraid they are more likely to change for the worse than for the better."

Gerald stared. "What on earth do you mean?" he asked.

"Well, it's not an easy thing to put into words if you haven't noticed it yourself. You may or you may not have done so. I have, and I am not the only one. Molly and I have been talking it over——"

"Eh?" interrupted Gerald with a broad grin. He regarded that Christian name as an admission. But his friend went on, quite unembarrassed.

"Molly—Miss Delaney; your niece, you know. She and I have been talking it over. You must have seen for yourself how incessantly that outrageous squireen is here. Have you got on to his manner to your sister-in-law?"

Gerald was thunderstruck. Preoccupied by his efforts to straighten out Bob's difficulties, he had been less observant than usual. But now a thousand trifles, unnoticed at the time, occurred to him. He tried to reply lightly, but his thoughts were busy.

"I never noticed that he had any manners at all."

"Probably not," answered Jack, "but he has; a certain style of manners quite peculiarly his own. It's no laughing matter, old fellow. In his breezy, unconventional way O'Hara is making fierce love to Mrs. Delaney, and what is worse, she seems to like it."

"Good God!" ejaculated Gerald. "That unspeakable bounder! Why he ought to be kicked from this to——"

Then he fell suddenly silent. Those liabilities of Bob's! The notes fell due on Wednesday. He knew that his nephew was even now negotiating for their renewal. It rested with O'Hara either to hold his hand or to turn the breaching artillery of the law on the last frail defences of Liscarrick. Clearly this was a situation to be tactfully and warily dealt with.

But of this Jack knew nothing. He merely filled in the pause in his own way, and assented warmly.

"Yes, he ought to be kicked from here to hell, and you're the man to do it. But you can't apply the same treatment to your sister-in law, and there the danger lies."

Before Gerald could reply they were joined by Mrs. Delaney and Molly, and he had no opportunity of pursuing the subject further. But finding there was half an hour to spare before lunch, he carried off Molly under pretence of exhibiting some pigs which formed the latest addition to the Liscarrick live stock.

Young as she was, Gerald had far more con-

fidence in his niece's good sense and discretion than he entertained for his nephew's, and instinctively it was to her he turned for light on this new trouble, and possibly for advice.

"Molly," he began abruptly as soon as they were alone, "what brings Mat O'Hara round the place so much?"

"Don't think it's me, uncle," replied the girl eagerly. "There were all kinds of horrid remarks and ill-natured talk about his making up to me, but I always loathed the beast."

"I acquit you, my dear; anyone can see how you regard him; but the question remains—what brings him here?"

"Bob brought him first. I ran off and stayed three days with Kate Fetherstone when I heard he was expected, but that couldn't last for ever. He kept coming and coming, and I had to put up with it."

"Yes, and he keeps on coming, but what's the attraction?" asked Gerald, pointedly.

Then Molly broke down, and her uncle saw the first tears he had detected in her eyes since she had wept as a baby over a broken doll.

"Oh, uncle Gerald; it sounds dreadful, and I'm almost ashamed to say it, but I'm afraid its Mamma."

"Don't cry, dear. If it's so, and I fear it is, it's got to be faced; and you and I are the only ones to face it so far as I can see," replied Gerald, beginning bravely but ending gloomily, as difficulties, of which Molly knew nothing, recurred to his mind. "Have you any idea how your mother regards him?"

"Oh, mamma's such a fool!" exclaimed Molly, passionately. "She'll listen to anyone who will pay her attention enough, and talk drivel about her eyes and figure."

"I may take it then that I shan't have an ally in Emmie," said Gerald half to himself, "rather the reverse indeed. Well, we must do without her."

"There's Bob," suggested Molly, but not very hopefully.

"I'm afraid we can't reckon on Bob," Gerald replied, with a vivid remembrance of the notes due on Wednesday.

"Oh, I don't know," urged Molly. "He would feel it in other ways. I've nothing at all you know, and Bob—well, there's no income from Liscarrick after the mortgage interest is paid—next to none that is. We are all living on Mamma's jointure."

Gerald gave vent to a prolonged whistle. Things certainly looked as black as they well could do.

"Well, we must only pull together, dear, all three of us, and do the best we can. I'll think it out, and we'll have another palaver soon. Come, there's the luncheon gong, let's go in."

"I'm so glad we've had this talk," said Molly, slipping her little hand through her uncle's arm, and giving it an affectionate squeeze. "I don't feel half so lonesome and helpless now."

"Do you know who first put me on the track?" asked Gerald. "It was Jack Whalen.

You and he have been laying your heads together over this."

"Yes," answered Molly, whose cheeks blazed suddenly as she tried to withdraw her arm. "He noticed how things were going; he said he'd speak to you. Do let me go, uncle. I must wash my face before I appear at lunch, or everyone will see I have been crying."

And Molly wrenched herself free, and ran into the house without glancing back.

"Molly's a case," mused Gerald, looking after her, "and so is Jack, or I'm much mistaken. Well, that's one bright spot, anyhow, in a pretty gloomy vista."

And he followed her indoors.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Golden Horseshoe.

Meanwhile the pathway of the youthful Lord of Liscarrick had been strewn with anything but roses. His uncle, while avowing his readiness to extend all the help in his power, was beset by scruples which seemed to Bob artificial and absurd. Mr. Gerald Delaney was a reputed millionaire. Then why not devote that reputation to the extinction of his nephew's debts, than which said nephew could conceive of no worthier object? Instead of this, it was with difficulty that he could be induced to refrain from publishing his impecuniosity to the world, and even that concession was hedged in with all sorts of conditions and exceptions.

Bob was angry with everyone—with Mat O'Hara for being his creditor, with his uncle for having omitted to come home as rich as people reasonably expected him to be; with himself—though this was barely acknowledged—for having become entangled in such a coil. And all the time the sands were running out, the weeks were slipping away with magical rapidity, and the day of reckoning was at hand. Constitutionally indolent as he was, and disposed to trust implicitly to the chapter of accidents, Bob felt that something must be done. He

slipped the certificates of the Golden Horse Shoe mine into his pocket and cantered into Drine to interview McMaster.

Gerald had submitted these certificates, according to promise, to his nephew's inspection, and the latter had been much struck by their handsome lithography and generally imposing appearance. There were four certificates for five thousand shares each, with a striking picture of the Goddess of Liberty in one corner and of a miner leaning on his pick in another. There was also a reproduction of the arms of California, and certain words setting forth that the company was incorporated under the laws of that State with a capital of ten million dollars, and that the holder was the owner of so many fifty dollar shares.

The figures appeared to represent wealth almost unimaginable in Western Ireland, and though he knew that his uncle regarded the scrip as practically valueless, Bob could not bring himself to believe that such gorgeous blazonry had been lavished on waste paper. At any rate, a gold mine was a gold mine, he told himself, and if he had been impressed by the magic of the words, why not O'Hara and McMaster?

On this day, as it happened, though at a somewhat earlier hour, Mat had ridden in to consult the attorney on the same subject.

"I've no information to give you," the latter told him. "The notes are due on Wednesday, as you know, but so far Master Bob has neither called nor written."

"Is the uncle going to take them up?" enquired O'Hara anxiously.

"How can I tell? It looks like it, else the other wouldn't be taking things so quietly."

"Begob, I hope he will. Then everything would be as aisy as shelling peas," remarked Mat.

"Ah, but if he doesn't," suggested the lawyer. "We must be prepared for either event. In that case, am I to let the paper go to protest?"

"What else?" assented the other.

"And then proceed to sue and levy," continued the attorney, his eyes glistening at the prospect of a long bill of costs.

"No, begob," shouted O'Hara, "I'm not going to risk seven hundred a year on the chanst of collecting a few hundreds—more betoken a pretty share of them would come your way. I've had a bill from you afore now 'Torney McMaster."

"So you think that any proceedings you might take against the son would prejudice your prospects with the mother?" commented McMaster, ignoring the taunt in the other's words.

"To be sure I do. But I think I've a good chanst to get the money, and the widow none the wiser. Put the screw on Bob and turn it till he squeals. Tell him if the money isn't ped to the day, you'll sell the roof from over his head and the flure from in under his feet. Sweat it out of him, Mac. The uncle isn't going to let that happen. We'll get the money."

"I hope so," replied the attorney. "At any rate, I have your clear instructions now, and I know how to act. And even if he doesn't pay, and you are averse from proceeding to the last extremity, you can easily obtain judgment and distrain on the horse."

"Take the beast for the damage, eh?" mused the Squireen. "Well, I'm not sweet on it. For one thing, it couldn't be kept from the ould girl above at Liscarrick, and though I think I have her pretty fond of me by this, it might just set her agen me. Women are unrasonable anyhow. And the little harse isn't what he was. I misthrust I give too much money for him in the first place, an' Bob's played the divil wid him since. No, just put the screw on; talk all ye like, but no law till I've been to church wid the widow."

"And are you quite satisfied with your progress in that direction?" said the attorney, smiling.

"Ye may ordher the weddin' present any day ye plaze," answered O'Hara with a leer. She's all ripe and ready, an' I'll pop the question on the first convaynient opportunity, and afther she once says 'Yes' there'll be little time cut to waste, I promise ye. Ye've seen me take many a salmon out of the Corragh afore now. An' it isn't often one gets away," he added significantly.

At this moment the clerk knocked at the door and announced Mr. Robert Delaney.

It was an unusually sheepish and disconcerted Mr. Robert Delaney who entered the attorney's

sanctum, and on finding that the Squireen was there before him he was visibly taken aback.

Two at a time was longer odds than he had bargained for. He hung a moment, hesitating, in the doorway.

"Come in, Mr. Delaney, come in," cried the attorney briskly. "I have been expecting to hear from you any day."

"Good morning, Mr. McMaster," said Bob advancing. "Good morning, Mat, how goes it?"

"Mornin'," said O'Hara gruffly, without offering to shake hands. And he turned his back and appeared to be admiring the dusty engravings on the walls.

"I suppose you've called in reference to those notes of yours," went on the lawyer. "Perhaps you'd like to take them up at once. They fall due the day after to-morrow."

"No, I called to speak to you about renewing. You remember, Mat, you said——"

"I remember nothing at all. I've a bad memory," interrupted O'Hara. "That's why I like to have things in black and white, and what's written I stand by."

"Oh, come, hang it all," cried Bob, stung by the other's bare-faced denial. "You said you hated lawyers and writings between gentlemen, and that the whole thing was only a matter of form."

"When did I ever say the like?"

"In your own parlour in Ballintubber the very night we first talked over the deal."

"Then I was drunk if I did, an' I mind

nothing about it." Mat turned again to his contemplation of the pictures, flinging an ultimatum viciously over his shoulder.

"Anyhow, it's in McMaster's hands now. Settle it between ye."

Bob turned helplessly to the lawyer.

"Well, I haven't got the money to pay; so now what will you do?"

"Sue on the notes, and when we have obtained judgment seize goods enough to satisfy it," answered the attorney.

I haven't any goods that would fetch anything," returned Bob. "Better renew."

"You have the horse," began McMaster, but O'Hara again interrupted.

"An' ye have Liscarrick—what's left of it, there ought to be enough between them to make up a thrifle like this."

Young Delaney drew a sharp breath that was almost a gasp. Here was a catastrophe he had never foreseen. While he stood, stricken silent, the lawyer threw in a reassuring word:

"Don't mind Mr. O'Hara's manner. He's a bit ruffled to-day. At any rate the money's not due yet. You have till Wednesday to find it."

Bob laughed derisively. "And where do you suppose I am to find sixteen hundred pounds in two days?" he asked.

"This is no subject for levity," reproved McMaster. "You should have thought of this when you went into the speculation. As for where you're to find this sum, it is not my place to advise you, but I should have thought a young gentleman of your position would have

had friends to whom he could appeal."

"There is my uncle Gerald," ventured Bob, who, considering that this name had been very near his lips ever since he entered the room, had borne himself not maladroitly.

"A gentleman of very considerable wealth I have been given to understand," observed McMaster. "If he will send a cheque for the amount—let me see—I haven't calculated the interest yet, but I can let him have a note of it in the course of the day—if he will give his cheque it will be quite satisfactory."

"I have spoken to him," Bob answered gloomily, "and he utterly refuses to pay it for me."

O'Hara, who had been an eager listener, turned suddenly.

"Then you may tell him from me I'll sell up Liscarrick, lock, stock, and barrel, but I'll have me rights."

"Gently, Mr. O'Hara," pleaded the attorney. "I can see that Mr. Delaney has an alternative proposition to advance. Let us hear him out."

"It's this," continued Bob. "He won't pay the money, but he'll put his name on the note if you'll renew."

"But why?" urged the attorney. "Is it not the same thing?"

"Heaven knows why," sighed Bob, wearily. "I argued with him on that very point for an hour, but he wouldn't give in. Call it a rich man's whim. There it is."

Mr. McMaster, who had a profound reverence for rich men and all their whims, pondered. If

Gerald were really solvent the security was good—quite as good as the cash. Nor did he forget that all this talk of legal pressure and selling Liscarrick was no more than a threat—a threat his client was not at the moment prepared to carry out.

"It is very strange," he said at last, "very strange that a gentleman of Mr. Gerald Delaney's means should prefer to incur a liability rather than pay this trifling amount. I suppose there is no doubt that your uncle is solvent? Remember, we know little of him here, and his property is far away."

"Solvent!" laughed Bob. "I only wish you and I had half his money. Look here," and he produced the elaborately lithographed certificates of shares from his pocket. "Here's a little trifle that he asked me to insure and register before posting them to his brokers in London."

Bob was neither very truthful nor very scrupulous, but in saying this he was going far beyond anything he had intended on leaving home. He had brought the certificates, without their owner's knowledge, intending no more than to exhibit them with a brag and a flourish when the negotiations were concluded. For it had never occurred to him that anyone would doubt his uncle's wealth or call his solvency in question. But finding himself in a difficulty, he, as his habit had been from boyhood, lied his way through it.

The certificates had the effect he anticipated. H'm! Golden Horse Mine! I seem to have

heard the name," commented McMaster, rustling the crisp paper as he read, while O'Hara hung over his shoulder. "Incorporated according to the laws of the State of California. Capital, ten million dollars. H'm! That's about two million sterling, and this scrip represents a face value of two hundred thousand pounds. Do you happen to know if the stock stands anywhere near par?" he continued, glancing up.

"It's at a slight premium, I think," answered Bob airily, "but my uncle believes in the property and is not anxious to sell."

"I can well understand how, with this amount of capital locked up, Mr. Gerald Delaney may prefer not to find even sixteen hundred pounds at a moment's notice," the lawyer remarked, as he returned the certificates. "Well, I think if you can persuade your uncle to accept your bill at thirty days we may consider the matter settled, Mr. Delaney."

"Only thirty days," said Bob, somewhat crestfallen. "That's a very short date. We had thought of three months."

"I think we are treating you very liberally—even indulgently," the attorney replied stiffly. "At any rate, it is as far as my client is prepared to go."

"Aye, take it or lave it," O'Hara broke in. "The day after to-morrow or that day month."

"That day month, of course," Bob said hurriedly. "My uncle promised his name, but said nothing about the date. If you will make out

the note and send it up to Liscarrick, you can have his signature."

"It shall be attended to to-morrow, and I will return your old notes cancelled when I have your uncle's acceptance. Is there anything else I can do for you, sir?"

"Nothing, thanks," replied Bob, preparing to go.

And Mr. Delaney was quite astute enough to go straight to the Post Office, which was situated immediately opposite Mr. McMaster's premises, and to remain there for some twenty minutes, before he mounted his pony, and, tossing a copper to the ragged urchin who held it, trotted home.

CHAPTER IX.

"WHISKEY WHALEN'S DAUGHTER."

GERALD was much relieved on receiving Bob's account of his interview with McMaster, though it may be doubted if he would have felt so well content if the version which his nephew supplied had been full and accurate. As it was, he was simply told that his mere name had smoothed away all difficulties, and, while marvelling that the attorney should be so easy to deal with, did not feel called upon to enter into any elaborate explanation. He calmly determined that the colt should be sold at once, and the money applied to the payment of the debt. Of the mining shares, which once more reposed snugly in their owner's portmanteau, or of the use made of them, Bob told his uncle no single word.

When, on the following morning, McMaster's clerk appeared with a bill at thirty days for some £1,648, Bob signed it, and Gerald accepted it without question. The former hovered uneasily round, so long as the attorney's man remained in the house, prepared to steer the conversation away from the dangerous topic should the clerk let fall any unguarded allusion to Golden Horseshoe stock and the imaginary wealth of the returned Californian.

But the interview was brief and strictly confined to the business on hand. As soon as they were alone, Gerald gave his graceless nephew a

sound lecture on his reckless conduct, and then, feeling inclined for more intellectual society than Bob could offer, ordered round the pony trap and drove over to the Priory.

In the course of these weeks a warm friendship had sprung up between Kate and Gerald. In her he found a companion whose interests were not all contained within the little strip of Ireland bounded by the Atlantic and McGillicuddy's Reeks. She could talk of the great world, of which she had had glimpses, and of the greater world which is contained in books. And to Gerald, harassed by the complications which had met him on the very threshold of his old home, and sick to death of the sordid cares which made up the life within it, companionship of a congenial kind was a necessity.

With his sister-in-law he had little in common. His brother's choice of a bride had pleased none of the family, Gerald regarding it, with some reason, as a *mesalliance*. Intellectually, he held her in contempt, and he felt so irritated at her encouragement of O'Hara that it was at times all he could do to preserve a decently civil demeanour.

With Bob, too, though he was still ignorant of the false position into which that young gentleman had betrayed him, he was seriously angry, and of his niece and of his old friend Jack Whalen he saw less and less each day. These young people seemed to grow increasingly sufficient for each other as time went on, and though Gerald watched their ripening attachment with a favourable eye, he was often lonely.

Under these circumstances the refined and luxurious atmosphere at the Priory, and the sympathetic welcome he always met with there, were inexpressibly comforting to him.

As for Kate, she had been prepared to like Gerald before she saw him, and she liked him better each day she knew him. It was the penalty of the morbid view she took of her position that she had few male friends. At the smallest hint of masculine attention her sensitive pride took the alarm.

But Gerald was different somehow. He was Molly's uncle, and as such placed by Kate on a pinnacle of seniority which his years scarcely warranted. And then he was rich—so rich, she told herself, that she need not fear he sought her society from any ulterior motive. No, if he liked her at all—and she was beginning to hope he did—it was a purely personal sentiment in which distilleries and money bags bore no part.

Gerald found Miss Fetherstone on this occasion in a mood which, in a lady of fewer attractions, he would have described as a "tantrum." She had a quick temper—quick, that is, to flare up as well as to die down, and she was apt to do or say things in moments of irritation which she bitterly regretted later.

It was only an hour before Gerald's arrival that she had summarily dismissed her favourite groom, Nolan, for some disobedience of orders, in the attempted justification of which he had been guilty of what she chose at the moment to regard as impertinence. But he was a good servant—she did not know where she was likely

to find a better, and, more than all, she liked the man, and he had been obviously distressed and shaken by his dismissal. This last counted for much with Kate, who was a thoroughly kind-hearted woman, and she had chafed herself into a mood in which experience had taught Mrs. Purvis that it was safest not to approach her.

She was seated alone upon the terrace when Gerald drove up.

Nolan, as usual, came from the yard at the sound of wheels and relieved the visitor of his pony. And Gerald, also as usual, had a kindly word or two for the groom, but he noticed that the reply was not so prompt and cheerful as aforetime.

"What's the matter with Nolan?" he asked after he had joined Kate, and the brief greetings had been exchanged which pass between friends who meet almost daily.

"I am seriously displeased with him," replied Kate. "I have been compelled to dismiss him."

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Gerald awkwardly. There were danger signals on the lady's cheeks which warned him not to pursue the subject.

"So am I," she said, "but he was insolent and disobedient. I had no choice."

"Too bad," remarked Gerald sympathetically. "Some people don't know when they're well off."

"But you are worried yourself," she said, looking at him. "What is it. Tell me?"

"May I smoke?" and as she nodded permission, he lit a cigarette.

He was worried, he could not deny it, and he

longed to share his burden. Well, why should he not? The scandal was no secret, he feared, and surely Kate was sympathetic.

"Is it about Bob?" she asked, watching him as he threw down the match and stamped upon it.

"Oh, Bob!" he exclaimed rather contemptuously. "Yes, he has been making an ass of himself and running into debt. However, I've luckily been able to arrange that for him, or the consequences might have been serious."

"What is it then?" The flush on her cheeks had faded out and there was a softened look in her eyes. Certainly she was interested —interested and sympathetic.

"What do you think of O'Hara?" he asked abruptly.

"Oh, it's O'Hara is it?" she said. "I don't think of him at all if I can help it, and if you'll take my advice, no more will you."

"I'm afraid we shall have to, whether we like it or no," and then he added with sudden vehemence. "What an unspeakable cad the fellow is."

"He is certainly a very unpleasant person," assented Kate.

"And he drinks," added Gerald gloomily.

"I'm afraid there's no doubt of that," she assented.

"And knowing all this," he continued hotly, "isn't it damnable—I beg your pardon—isn't it disgusting, that Emmie encourages him."

"Oh, Mr. Delaney, surely no, I have noticed —I mean Molly has—Oh no! Mrs. Delaney

isn't very wise, I am afraid, and she's rather too fond of admiration—but encourage Mat O'Hara in the sense you mean—I'll never believe it of her."

"Heaven grant you're right," sighed Gerald, "but if you'd seen what I've seen—days and weeks of it. O'Hara's game is plain enough, Emmie has a jointure—it's about all they have among them—God help them—and if this creature wins the stake he is playing for, Liscarrick will have to go."

"Surely Mr. O'Hara would not exact that. He has means."

"But he surely will. What do you suppose he is courting my sister-in-law for? Every one knows she has a few hundreds a year."

"For shame, Mr. Delaney! Are you one of those who believe a man cannot love a woman for herself, without a thought of what she can command in cash?"

"I am a firm believer in love for love's sake," answered Gerald. "But when a man like O'Hara goes courting a woman fifteen years his senior, one is forced to look for motives."

"Have you spoken to Mrs. Delaney," asked Kate. "If she only reflected—"

"She never reflected in her life," said Gerald, bitterly. "Her brain is the size of a pea, and it rattles."

"Her heart is large enough," retorted Kate. When I came to the Priory a stranger, it was she stood my sponsor in the county."

"Surely, Miss Fetherstone needed no sponsor, least of all Mrs. Delaney, *née* Miss

Emily Hogan," exclaimed Gerald. "All Ireland knows the Fetherstones of Lisnahoe."

"And all the world knows the Whalens of the Shamrock Blend." She spoke with bitter emphasis, all the morbid hatred she felt for her position reflecting itself in her tone. "The Whalens' are far better known than the Fetherstones. The name is on every hoarding in every newspaper. If you go into a railway refreshment room you cannot help seeing it. I can't. It hits my eye on every public-house window as I drive through Dublin—or London, for that matter. I have seen it at midnight, on my way home from the opera, flaring in gas-jets from the house-tops—changing from green to crimson on some great transparency. 'Drink Whalen's Whiskey! The finest in the world!'"

"But this is sensitiveness run mad," said the bewildered Gerald, as she paused for breath. "Your name is not Whalen; you have nothing to do with the business or its advertisments, except to draw your dividends."

"I practically own it—I and my sister."

"I would not think of it, if I were you, if it works you up like this. Forget it!"

"Forget it," she cried impatiently, "I wish I could. I shall never forget it—never escape from it. A few months ago I was cursed in the streets of Dublin by a woman whose life had been ruined by a drunken husband."

"Not your fault," Gerald said.

"No, not my fault, but it shows how clearly the world remembers that Katherine Fetherstone's mother was 'Whiskey Whalen's' daughter."

She rose and paced up and down the terrace for a few minutes, obviously struggling to regain her self-control. Gerald watched her curiously. To him her outbreak had seemed almost hysterical, and yet, in other matters, a saner, better balanced young woman than Kate Featherstone he had never met. But certainly, on this particular day he had found her in a peculiar mood.

She stopped and stood in front of him, her hands clasped behind her, looking down on him. Gerald waited for her to break the silence, but she did not speak. And, for the life of him, he could think of nothing appropriate to say.

Just as the situation was beginning to grow awkward it was relieved by the groom who came round from the back of the house and, mounting the terrace, touched his hat.

"Well, Nolan, what is it?" asked his mistress.

"I beg yer pardon, miss; but the coachman is out, and who am I to lave the key of Red Rover's box wid av ye plaze?"

Kate's anger had quite evaporated. Far different emotions had usurped its place. She was forced to pause a moment before she could recall all the circumstances.

"Oh, yes; I was going to speak to you," she said, presently. "Don't you know that I cannot endure to see a bearing rein on a horse?"

"Yes Miss, but as I was strivin' to tell ye, Bay Champion bores wid his head that much that——"

"I daresay you had a reason," interrupted Kate, "but reason or no reason, I want you to

remember that when I say a thing I mean it. Now, all I want to be sure is that this shan't occur again. You may keep Red Rover's key."

"D'ye mane, Miss, that I——" Nolan broke off and hope glistened in his eyes.

"You need not go if you prefer to stay. I have no fault to find with you but the one, and perhaps this will be a lesson to you. Now you can go back to the yard."

"Long life to ye, Miss! I'll niver put a check rein on horse of yours again, not av he stood up on his hind legs and axed for it. Long life to ye, miss, an' thank ye kindly wanst more."

And Nolan turned and ran down the terrace steps, muttering as he went. "Begorra, she's the raal sort, an' her bark was always worse nor her bite."

"You have made one heart happy to-day," said Gerald smiling as he watched the groom's retreating figure.

"Yes; after having made the poor fellow miserable for an hour or two—to say nothing of myself. I should never have made so much of so small a fault. I wish I had my temper under better control," she went on with a sigh. "I always go too far."

"And then take it back. It is a woman's privilege," smiled Gerald.

"But some day I may say or do something I can't take back," replied Kate. "Come in and have a cup of tea. I see Mrs. Purvis waving her hand at the window."

And they passed into the house together.

CHAPTER X.

Mat O'Hara's Wooing.

Gerald and Molly were strolling up and down the back avenue at Liscarrick, enjoying the last of the afternoon sun, for the weather was bright and promised frost. Jack Whalen had taken a gun down to the bog, and hoped to return with a few snipe or wild duck. Molly was, in consequence, quite at her uncle's disposal and the two were planning a servants' and tenants' ball, wherewith Gerald proposed to celebrate the fast approaching Christmas.

Such festivities had been frequent at Liscarrick in the old days, and he had taken part in many a one, but for years the practice had been discontinued, and it was Gerald's whim to revive it on this occasion.

"Mat O'Hara's sure to come and get drunk and spoil everything," said Molly, falling suddenly from pleasant anticipation into profound despondency as the name she hated occurred to her.

"Not he," replied her uncle, "I'll be host for the time being, and I'll take jolly good care he's not asked."

"As if he'd wait for an invitation! Ballintubber is one of Bob's farms and if the tenants are invited he'd consider himself entitled to come."

"Well, we'll see," said the other. "Don't let him get on your nerves anyhow. I'm determined we shall have one good old spree with or without Master Mat."

At this moment Molly caught a distant glimpse of a big grey horse which Larry was leading round to the stable yard.

"I believe that's his horse." she exclaimed. He's here this minute. I'd better run in, Uncle. Mamma's all alone."

"Come along, I'll go with you," cried Gerald, turning to follow her, for she had already started.

But Molly outran him.

O'Hara was a brisk wooer and he failed to see that anything was to be gained by delay, so, as the ground was too hard for hunting, he determined to ride over and, as he phrased it, "discoorse the widow."

His mind was disturbed by none of the doubts which are popularly supposed to torment the swain about to put his fate to the touch. Indeed, he had few misgivings as to the result of an embassy whose success, in any event, he determined to secure by the simple process of refusing to take "no" for an answer. He sacrificed so far to the occasion as to pay a little extra attention to his dress, and to wash his hands—this last a highly desirable innovation. Then, having fortified himself with a glass or two of the Shamrock Blend, he mounted his horse and cantered up to Liscarrick.

Fortune so far favoured him that he found his lady-love immediately. She was near the door,

engaged in snipping dead leaves from the ivy which covered the front of the house, when he rode up.

"The top of the mornin' to ye, ma'am. It's a fine evening ye have for yer gardenin'," he remarked as he swung himself out of the saddle and surrendered his horse to Larry, who appeared opportunely.

"Oh, Mr. O'Hara, how you startled me," fluttered the widow, dropping her basket and scissors.

"Begob, then, if ye knew how it becomes ye, ye'd go through life in a fright," replied Mat, gallantly stooping to retrieve the fallen articles.

Mrs. Delaney stooped for the same purpose, and their fingers met. This was the Squireen's opportunity, and he seized it and the fair hand simultaneously.

"Arrah, don't be sthrivin' to take it from me," pleaded he, resisting her feeble efforts to withdraw. "Can't ye lave this purty little hand wid me for a minute anyhow, till ye tell me whether I may have it for ever an' a day."

"Mr. O'Hara! Please—do let me go. Don't you see we're right in front of the windows. What *will* people think?"

"Divil a hair I care what they think," he rejoined with well simulated passion. "Mat O'Hara's not ashamed of his honest love. Ye must have seen what I was afther this many a day. It's not the scrag of mutton or the odd glass of whiskey that brings me to Liscarrick. Sure I've got betther at home. It's yer own deeny, dainty, dawnshee self."

"Mr. O'Hara"—began the lady, but he interrupted her.

"Call me Mat,—yer own Mat. Sure it's proud an' happy I'd be to have ye wipin' yer two little weenshee feet on me every minute of the day."

"Don't, please!" She was defending herself more vigorously than he had expected. "You must really behave. Do you know you're talking very strangely."

"I'm talking the language of love, darlint," he protested, "an' I hope that'll never be strange to ye as long as Mat O'Hara has a tongue in his head."

Mrs. Delaney was beginning to yield. His arm had stolen round her waist and he was bending down to look in her face.

"Well," she began bashfully, and speaking very low——

"Spake up, avick," he broke in. "Say that ye love me. Out wid it. Sure I've read it in yer eyes this many a day."

At this juncture up dashed Molly, breathless and dishevelled. She took in the situation at a glance.

"Mamma, dear," the girl panted as her mother abruptly drew away from the encircling arm, "come in a moment. I want you particularly."

"Molly, child, how untidy you look," reproved the elder lady, "and where are your manners?" Don't you see Mr. O'Hara?"

"How do you do, Mr. O'Hara?" Molly uttered perfunctorily, and then renewed her

importunity. "Won't you come in with me. It's most urgent."

"I think yer mamma will find betther entertainment here," said Mat, and he turned to Mrs. Delaney. "Eh, ducky?"

"Oh, do come, mamma dear," pleaded the agonised girl. Then seeing that her mother hesitated and glanced at her companion, she added in desperation. "Mr. O'Hara will come too."

"Sorra fear of it, honey," returned the wooer. "Mat O'Hara knows when he's well off. Eh, my little chickabiddy groundsel?" and, as he spoke, his arm stole once more round Mrs. Delaney's waist.

Molly stood for a moment appalled, and then turned and fled back by the way she had come.

"I'll bring Uncle Gerald," she said to herself, as she ran.

Mat felt that time was growing short and bent all his energies to bring matters to a crisis.

"Say ye'll be mine," he urged. "Only one little word?"

"It seems so foolish," simpered the widow. "With grown-up children too."

"What have they to do wid the state of yer affections?" cried O'Hara, indignantly. "Come Emmie, say ye'll marry me. Ye'll niver do betther. Ballintubber's a sweet place, an' sure life won't be worth livin' till I see yerself in it."

What form of words Mrs. Delaney chose to convey her assent will never be known, nor is it certain that she spoke at all; but Mat put his own interpretation on her speech, or on her

silence, and the next moment she was in his arms.

He had time to snatch but a single kiss and exultantly exclaim, "Hurroo for the luck of the O'Hara's!" when Molly appeared, urging her uncle forward.

Mrs. Delaney extricated herself with a faint scream, but Mat was in nowise abashed.

"Hello, brother-in-law," he exclaimed, "you're just in time to hear the good news. Shall I tell him, Emmie darlint, or shall I lave him to guess it?"

Though long expected, this revelation came to Gerald with a shock that momentarily stunned him. Ignoring the Squireen's impertinence, he turned limply to Molly.

"Too late," he said. "Too late, I'm afraid."

"Begob, I'll tell him," continued O'Hara, briskly. "Why should we make a sacret of it. Sure we're all a family party together, an' it'll be in the papers soon. I'm the luckiest man in the Barony, Gerald avick. Emmie here has just promised to have me."

"It isn't true, is it Emmie? You're not going to marry this—this—" Gerald broke off without committing himself to an epithet.

"Thrue," cried Mat, swaggering forward. "D'ye think I'd be afther lyin' to ye? To be sure it's thrue! Have ye anything to say agen it?"

"Emmie," Gerald persisted, "I'm waiting for your answer. Have you promised to marry this—*gentleman*?"

"I trust you approve, Gerald dear," faltered Mrs. Delaney.

"No I don't," answered her brother-in-law, bluntly.

O'Hara thrust his face close to Gerald's.

"What have ye agen me, Mr. Gerald Delaney?" he shouted. "Maybe I'm not good enough for your sister. The O'Haras are as long in the county as the best Delaney that ever stepped in Liscarrick, an' I could buy an' sell the place an' all that's in it."

"I am not calling in question either the length of your pedigree or the depth of your purse," answered Gerald icily. "I suppose I am entitled to my own opinion of the connection, nevertheless."

"An' why? What have ye agen me?" persisted Mat.

"For one thing, I disapprove of widows marrying at all."

"Don't say that, Gerald dear," pleaded his sister-in-law.

"Oh, you! I'm ashamed of you!" he retorted, almost brutally.

"Oh, but you mustn't think hard of me," she went on. "I'm sure I esteemed and loved your dear brother as much as any woman could. He was trying sometimes, I'll admit, but I loved—oh yes, I loved him, and was a good wife to him."

"If he wouldn't like it, he'd a right to have stopped alive," interposed the Squireen.

Gerald turned on his heel and addressed his niece, whose face of agony and terror, as she

stood silent and listening, emphasised the tragedy that underlay this strange scene.

"Molly, go and see if you can find your brother."

Mat felt he was master of the situation and acquiesced.

"Ay, do, Molly acushla," he said. "Sure, its at a moment like this I'd wish to have all me childher round me." Then as she turned to go, he grasped her by the shoulder.

"But there's no hurry; haven't ye a kiss for yer dada afore ye start?"

"How dare you? Let me go," panted Molly, furiously.

"Not without a kiss," the other persisted. "Come, be a good little girl!"

"Let her go, sir," interposed Gerald, now thoroughly angry. "I'm sending my niece on message."

"Send yer niece to the divil if ye like," retorted O'Hara. "That's no reason I shouldn't kiss me daughter," and he bent down towards Molly.

With all the strength of her young arm, and it was not small, Molly smote him straight between the eyes.

"Let me go, you great brute!" she cried, and as O'Hara staggered back, confused and astonished, she sped on her errand.

Mrs. Delaney screamed and subsided into a garden chair, where she sat, weeping softly and wringing her hands.

"Begorra, she's as strong as a two year ould heifer," said Mat as he struggled to his feet, for

he had tripped as he gave back and measured his length on the turf. Then he faced Gerald with a lowering look. "It's well for ye that it wasn't you give me that shot."

Gerald looked him up and down, and his fingers itched to serve the bully as Molly had done; but in an instant Mrs. Delaney had risen and was clinging to Mat's arm, hoping he was not hurt and begging both men in turn to shake hands and be friends.

"I'm sure I don't know what all this trouble is about," she wailed. "Dear knows, I'm only anxious to please everybody."

"Which is the surest way of pleasing nobody," retorted Gerald, who by a violent effort had got his temper again in hand.

"I ax ye once more, what have ye agen me?" said O'Hara, who could not help carrying his hand to his face from time to time and holding it there as if in pain.

"If I told you, I don't think you would understand," answered Gerald. "But this gentleman is his mother's natural guardian. Ask him."

For Bob was now approaching with his sister.

"Oh, him!" said the Squireen contemptuously. "He won't offer to shut the dure in me face. Ye wouldn't have me for a partner in the little harse, Bob; maybe we'll get on betther when I'm a mimber of the family."

"Never with my good will, Mat O'Hara," Bob replied.

But Gerald, as he listened, realised that his nephew was not to be depended upon, and that

himself must bear the brunt of this battle in his own person. Bob was clearly afraid of the Squireen. The thought of the sixteen hundred cowed him.

"Oh dear," sighed Mrs. Delaney. "This ought to be the happiest day of my life—one of the happiest, I should say—and I declare you all do all you can to make me wretched."

"Niver heed them, darlint," said Mat consolingly. "A purty thing it would be if childher could forbid their parents' marriages. Sure there'd be no childher at all at that rate."

Meanwhile uncle and nephew exchanged a few rapid words.

"We're powerless," the former whispered, "all we can do is to spar for time."

Then he approached the Squireen with a complete change of manner.

"Well, Mr. O'Hara, I can see nothing to be gained by quarrelling. My sister-in-law must be the judge of her own happiness."

"Now ye're talking sinse," cried Mat. "An' ye'll dance at the weddin'?"

"Surely," said Gerald.

But Molly plucked him by the sleeve.

"What are you saying, uncle? I wouldn't have believed——"

"Hush, Molly! You don't understand."

"We'll do the thing in style," boasted O'Hara, heedless or unobservant of this by-play. "Postillions an' white favours an' lashins of whisky punch. We were talkin' of New Year's Day, weren't we, Emmie?"

"Oh no! No day was mentioned!"

"New Year's Day, O'Hara!" cried Gerald. "Oh, no."

"An' I say oh yes," asserted Mat.

"But consider; that's less than two weeks off."

"An' I'd be the betther plazed if it was only two minutes," asserted this impetuous wooer.

"Come O'Hara," urged Gerald, "you and I are men of the world. We know that ladies have their little preparations to make on these occasions. We mustn't hurry them."

"I couldn't possibly be ready for months," cried Emmie, helplessly.

"Och, murther," ejaculated O'Hara. "Sure what's the good of waitin' like that? It's not younger we'll be gettin', either of us."

"About Easter, now, is a very fashionable time," suggested Gerald, diplomatically.

"I'm no fashionable man," said Mat doggedly, "and I won't face Lent single. Spake up, darlint, an' make it a short coortin'?"

"Two months would be the very least—or three," hesitated the bride elect.

O'Hara took her up short.

"Two!" I pin ye to it. That'll bring us to February. We'll be married, wid the blessing of St. Valentine, the very day all the little dickey-birds pair. That's when we'll mate—eh, me little wood pigeon?"

And Mrs. Delaney, after a proper show of coy reluctance, assented.

Bob, to whom a reprieve was ever as good as a pardon, felt that his uncle had scored a victory, and conveyed as much to him in an exultant whisper.

"A lot of things can happen in two months."

"A lot of things can be *made* to happen," replied Gerald, significantly.

CHAPTER XI.

MOLLY MEETS AN ADVENTURE AND FINDS A PROTECTOR.

MRS. DELANEY had withdrawn to her room to rest while Mat O'Hara, deliberately setting himself to win Bob back to his allegiance, had linked arms with the young master of Liscarrick, and led him in the direction of the stable yard.

Bob submitted as rebelliously as a miscoupled greyhound, yet, taking his cue from his uncle, and conscious that the latter had some plan whose execution involved keeping on terms with the Squireen, he did his best to respond to the other's boisterous gaiety and even listened to his criticism of "the little harse," with a show of respect.

Molly's mood, meanwhile, was little short of despairing. She was beginning to fear O'Hara as much as she hated him, and her heart bled for her weak, good-natured mother. The girl could imagine no fate more dreadful than that on which she was blindly rushing.

Yearning for companionship and a sympathetic ear in which to pour her troubles, Molly followed her uncle into the library, but he speedily dismissed her, saying he wanted to be alone to smoke and think.

Repulsed in this quarter she left the house to try if a good brisk walk might not, as it had often done in pettier sorrows, allay her misgivings and bring her peace.

She took the lower bog road, partly because it was lonely and partly because it was the most likely way for Jack Whalen to choose on his way back from shooting.

She stepped out at a smart pace, for she was a good walker, and cared little for the darkness which had begun to close in even before she set out, and was now as thick as it usually is at five o'clock of a December evening.

Pursuing her own reflections, and occasionally breaking into a run, like a horse under the spur, when stung by some maddening thought, the girl had gone, perhaps, a couple of miles, when the clatter of hoofs behind her caused her to draw into the side of the road, and as the rider came up with her she recognised the Squireen.

She blamed herself for not remembering that the road she had chosen was an acknowledged short cut to Ballintubber, but she bent her head and pursued her way, trusting to escape notice in the darkness.

Mat O'Hara, however, had a keen eye for a good figure, and this clean-stepping colleen on a lonely road promised an adventure quite to his taste. He reined up as he drew abreast of her, and stooping from the saddle, endeavoured to make out the girl's features. But Molly's head was resolutely averted.

"Where are ye off to in such a hurry, me pretty lass?" he asked. "Don't be sthrivin' to run away," he went on, as Molly involuntarily quickened her pace, "or if ye're in a raal hurry I'm quite agreeable to take ye up behind me."

On this she stopped suddenly, and his horse's

pace carried him beyond her. But he reined in and, dismounting, was beside her again in a moment.

"Don't be so shy, acushla," he whispered in his most winning tones. "Just come along with me. It's only a short mile or two home, walkin' or ridin' yer choice, an' ye'll find me the height of pleasant company."

Molly would fain have retained her incognito, but he attempted to slip his arm round her as he spoke, and she was terrified. She twisted herself out of his grasp and faced him.

"For shame, Mat O'Hara," she cried. "Don't you dare to lay a finger on me."

Mat recognised her on the instant. The voice was enough even if he had not seen the face, and he was momentarily taken aback. If the man had been quite sober it is probable he would have muttered an apology and gone on his way. But he had come to Liscarrick well primed, and he had not been slow to accept Bob's sulky proffer of refreshment, so, his native impudence coming to his aid, he stood his ground.

"So it's yourself, is it?" he said. "I couldn't make out who was in it, but one niver knows his luck. Now Miss Molly, av ye plaze, I'll take that kiss I didn't get awhile ago, though I ped dear enough for it."

"Stand back!" she cried. "I'll hit harder this time."

"That I'll go bail ye won't," retorted O'Hara, and he seized the girl's wrists. "Now, me lady," he growled, "I think I've got ye."

But Molly fought like a wild cat, sending forth shriek after shriek into the stillness of the night.

"The divil take ye, will ye stop that yowlin'," panted O'Hara. All the obstinacy of his nature was aroused, and he was determined to have that kiss, cost what it might. But Molly struggled fiercely, though with failing strength, as the man gradually over-mastered her resistance.

With a last despairing scream for help she suddenly threw herself on the ground, thereby breaking for the moment his hold on her wrists. At the same instant a powerful grip fell on O'Hara's collar from behind, plucking him backward.

"You blackguard," uttered Jack Whalen's voice; "how dare you?"

And at the words, which seemed to her the most welcome she had ever heard, for the first time in her life Molly fainted.

"Mind yer own business," yelled the infuriated Squireen, turning savagely on the newcomer. "Mayn't a man kiss his own daughter?"

"No, nor anyone else's against her will while I'm around," was Jack's reply.

"Lave this while the goin's good," thundered Mat, "or I'll give ye a clip at the back of the lug that'll sicken ye."

"Try it," responded Jack, tersely.

And Mat did try it, to his immediate discomfiture. Jack Whalen's hands had been taught to keep his head, and in a moment the bully was rolling on the frosty road.

"If you want any more, I've plenty left," said Jack, but the Squireen apparently was satisfied, and scrambling to his feet, stumbled towards his horse.

But Jack was before him, and giving the animal a hearty smack on the quarter, he started it down the road.

"You can walk," he observed. "It will cool your hot blood, and there will be a moon directly."

So Mat O'Hara walked.

The dragon thus disposed of, Jack turned to seek the damsel in distress whom he had rescued. In the darkness and confusion, he had recognised neither Molly nor O'Hara. She was sitting up when he reached her, for her momentary unconsciousness had lasted scarce longer than the winking of an eyelid. It was rather the protest of overstrained nerves than the result of physical exhaustion.

He stretched out his hand to help her to her feet.

She took it and rose, and then he knew her.

"Molly!" he exclaimed.

She thought her pretty Irish name had never sounded so sweet as now when she heard it for the first time from his lips.

"Molly," he exclaimed, "I had no idea—why, what a fortunate thing I came by this road. Who was that ruffian?"

But Molly reflected. "If I tell him who it was, he will not stop at this, and O'Hara is so persistent and unscrupulous, mischief might come of their meeting," so she replied:

"Some drunken beast. I shouldn't have come out of the place at all so late. It's fair day at Drine and the roads are full of them."

"Indeed you should not," assented Jack. "It was the merest chance I came this road. I was just debating if I could have missed my way when I heard you scream."

"Thank God you did," said Molly, fervently.

"Thank God indeed," he repeated, as he stooped to grope for his gun, which he had dropped at the moment of his encounter with O'Hara.

It was quickly found, and the two paced along the darkling lane together.

Much may be said in a two mile walk, and Molly's tongue was not idle. Only keeping back the identity of her late assailant, she gave her companion a full account of the afternoon's happenings at Liscarrick. He heard her in consternation.

"But this is too terrible," he said. "Do you mean to tell me that your mother is really in—really cares for that creature?"

"I'm afraid she does," answered the girl, "at any rate, she fancies she does."

"Then, Molly, this is no fit home for you!"

"Molly" again! She heard it with a faint, delightful flutter at the heart. It seemed to mean so much as he spoke it. But she answered calmly enough.

"If Mat O'Hara comes to Liscarrick, it certainly is no home for me or any decent person. But what can one do?"

Then Jack spoke. He was only a struggling journalist, he said; he had not much to offer

her; but what he had was hers, and he loved her with his whole heart. Would she? could she? and much more to the same purpose.

And Molly thought she could, and said she would.

By the time this was fully understood and settled they had reached Liscarrick. Lights were burning in the hall, and they paused a moment in the dusk of the porch for the final words that always seem to leave still more to say. Jack took her hand, but he fancied she shrank from him.

"Molly!" he whispered, reproachfully.

"Oh, it isn't that," she said, quick to interpret his meaning. "Here's my hand, only go gently with my wrist, for it's very painful."

He led her into the lighted hall and bent to examine the little hand. When he saw the livid marks on the white arm he drew in his breath with a sharp intake.

"That cursed brute! I wish I hadn't let him off so easily."

Then he stopped and let fall on the bruised flesh a kiss as light as a snowflake.

"Poor you!" he whispered.

Gerald, emerging from the library at the conclusion of his "smoke and think," saw the action. They did not observe him, and he turned, and very quietly re-entered the room.

CHAPTER XII.

Mother and Daughter.

When they parted in the hall Jack sought the library where he found Gerald, and after enduring a certain amount of good natured chaff, poured into his friend's sympathetic ear the tale of his newly-found happiness.

Molly went straight to her mother.

Mrs. Delaney was dressing for dinner—an operation of some duration as the lady conducted it, and involving no little skill. Molly, who was hot and cold by turns as she recalled her adventure on the bog road, hardly waited for a reply to her knock ere she burst into the room.

"Mamma, I've been grossly insulted by Mr. O'Hara!"

Mrs. Delaney, still poising her powder-puff, stared at her daughter open-mouthed.

"You're dreaming, child. Mr. O'Hara went home hours ago."

"Maybe so, but he met me on the lower road, beyond the lime-kiln, and was dreadfully rude to me," maintained the girl, her cheeks flaming anew as she recalled the circumstances.

"How long ago was this?" asked Mrs. Delaney, with a provoking air of incredulity. "I heard half-past four strike some time before he left."

"Five o'clock, or thereabouts," answered Molly shortly.

"Dark night!" said her mother. "How often have I told you not to wander about the roads so late, and Drine fair of all nights."

"I was wrong to go out, I admit,"—but there was no penitence in Molly's tone,—"I went further than I intended. I didn't think where I was going, I was so put out at—at what I heard to-day. But that's no reason the man should have insulted me."

"I'm sure he never meant to insult you, dear. You are too touchy. His manner may be a little brusque at times, but his heart is in the right place."

"Brusque, do you call it? Look at my wrists," and Molly slipped off the bed where she had seated herself and held out her arms for her mother's inspection.

"Molly, dear, how you're bruised. Wait a minute; I've some Pond's extract somewhere," and Mrs. Delaney began to open and shut drawers in an unavailing search. "Will you tell me what happened?"

"I've been trying to," said the girl, "but you seem not to believe me. I tell you this precious O'Hara of yours overtook me on the bog road and insulted me and held my hands till he hurt me like this, and tried to kiss me—Ugh!' and Molly's face was eloquent of her disgust.

"Impossible! Mr. O'Hara is a gentleman."

"Is he?" retorted Molly. "Anyhow, I'm telling you what he's done. Make the most of it."

"I'm not doubting you, dear," said the

mother, woefully perplexed and perturbed, "only I think you must be mistaken. We all know there are horrid drunken men about every fair day, but it was five o'clock, you say. It must have been as dark as pitch. How do you know it was Mr. O'Hara?"

"How do I know anything? I saw him——"

"In the dark," interposed Mrs. Delaney.

"You must take me for a fool," exclaimed her daughter hotly, for her patience was exhausted. "And I heard his voice," she added.

"Mr. O'Hara has the accent of the country. You may easily have been mistaken in the voice."

"Oh, very well! None so blind as those who will not see. I say it was O'Hara, and I was there and you were not," and Molly moved towards the door.

"Nonsense," said the elder lady, growing irritable in her turn. "It was quite easy for you to make a mistake—I know your prejudice against the poor fellow, but Mat is quite too much the gentleman to be guilty of such a thing."

"Maybe so," said Molly quietly, "but I hold my own opinion still."

"Stopping you on the road! The idea," pursued the widow, beginning to realise that, if Molly were to be believed, her lover's fealty to her own charms must be slight indeed. "The idea! as if he would be likely to bother his head about a chit of a girl like you."

"If that's the way you look at it, there's no more to be said," observed Molly, opening the

door. She looked back to add: "And please say nothing about the matter downstairs. Above all, don't say I accused Mat O'Hara."

"I certainly shall not," assented Mrs. Delaney. "I am little likely to countenance such a charge against my affianced husband, and I am not anxious that your uncle or his friend should know you went outside the place after dark on such a night as this."

Mrs. Delaney was angry, and anger made her unjust. Moreover, she could not quite bring herself to think that there was not some foundation for her daughter's unshakeable opinion, and jealousy stirred within her. That a man should vow eternal love for her and then go, with her kisses on his lips, to seek a similar favour from another woman, and that woman her daughter! No, she would not believe unless she heard it from himself. It was unthinkable.

Molly closed the door and sought her room, where she proceeded to overhaul her scanty wardrobe with a view to selecting the dress whose sleeves came down most closely to cover the wrists.

Her simple toilet completed, she ran downstairs, hoping to secure a quiet ten minutes with her uncle before dinner.

Gerald was pacing up and down the hall. He had been much upset by the day's happenings, and the definite news of Molly's engagement was the sole thing that pleased him. He was looking out for her, and when she appeared he led her into the library. After he had duly kissed and congratulated her, he asked,

"Now, Molly, what is all this Jack has been telling me about a drunken ruffian attacking you on the bog road?"

"He wasn't drunk, at least he seemed no drunker than usual," she replied. "It was Mat O'Hara."

"My God!" cried Gerald, falling back a step in his amazement. "You can't mean that!"

"It is perfectly true," asserted Molly.

"And he . . . . Well, I had no high opinion of him, but I didn't conceive he could be such a blackguard as that. And he caught hold of you, and hurt your arms cruelly, Jack says. Let me look. Oh, I see, you have them covered up."

"As well as I could," Molly answered, pushing back her tight sleeve a little way. "There you can just see."

"The d——d brute," cried her uncle. "Well we have him now, I think. But Jack spoke as if he did not know him. I gathered that it was the act of some casual ruffian."

"Jack did not recognise him. It was very dark, and the whole thing didn't take a minute. And I don't want him to know who it was. Uncle, you must promise me not to tell him."

"Why?" asked Gerald, surprised.

"Oh Uncle, I'd be so *ashamed* if he knew. I never could look him in the face again. It's bad enough while he thinks it was just a drunken man from the fair—but someone he's met in this house! Oh, promise, uncle!"

"All right. I'll let it go at that so far as Jack is concerned," said Gerald. "But there's one

person who must be told, and told at once, and that's your mother."

"I've told her, not half an hour ago," answered Molly.

"You have! Well, what did she say?"

"She didn't believe me," said Molly shortly.

"Not believe you! But that's absurd. Did she see the state of your wrists?"

"Oh, she believes someone attacked me, but Mr. O'Hara is quite too much of a gentleman in her eyes to make such behaviour on his part conceivable."

"She's a pretty judge of a gentleman," muttered Gerald bitterly.

He referred to the fact, well nigh forgotten in the changed neighbourhood but vividly remembered in the family circle of the proud Delaneys, that Emmie Hogan had originally come to Liscarrick in the humble capacity of nursery governess, though she had remained to marry the eldest son of the house, and rule there after he had gone.

Molly quite understood the reference. "Mamma is infatuated about this fellow, that is clear," she said. "She'll believe nothing against him, and if she did I don't suppose it would make much difference."

"She *must* believe," replied Gerald with emphasis. "There's the gong, dear, run along. I won't tell Jack, only you must change this anxious, troubled face. That's no kind of a mug for a newly-engaged young lady to present to her lover."

CHAPTER XIII.

The Squireen's Version.

The next morning's post bag brought Mrs. Delaney her first letter from the Squireen. It was certainly a love letter, if passionate phrases and terms of endearment could make it such, but to the lady it was more precious still, since it proved that Mat could not possibly have been the guilty person in the affair of the previous evening.

He had met with an accident overnight, he wrote, and would have to keep his bed for a few days. Nothing serious; his dearest Emmie was not to be uneasy, but the fact was he had not gone straight home on leaving Liscarrick, but had ridden into Drine to assist Tim Reilly, his herd, in driving home some store bullocks from the fair. "The beasts," he explained, "was up in themselves and mighty unaisy to handle. One of them made a run at me and rolled me over on the road, and two or three of them stepped on me. I think no bones is broke, but I'm a bit shook, and one of them put his foot on my face and left it very sore. It'll be a few days afore I can get round to see you, and that hurts me more nor my face."

And so with much love and many crosses tastefully executed in ink, he signed himself "Your loving Mat."

This was a perfect alibi, and proved that Molly

had been mistaken, to her mother's entire satisfaction. But, strangely enough, the girl did not accept it. Indeed, she roundly asserted that there was only a single statement she could believe in the whole letter, and that was that O'Hara's face would not be presentable for a few days. Asked why this should find more credence than the rest, Molly hesitated and changed colour, for she remembered, only just in time, that she had not explained to her mother how she had escaped from her assailant, nor alluded to Jack Whalen's share in the matter in any way.

"Well, since you are so obstinate," said Mrs. Delaney, irritably. "perhaps you'd like me to send for Tim Reilly and question him?"

"Waste of time," answered Molly, curtly. "I wouldn't believe either of them on oath. What one says the other swears to."

So mother and daughter were as far from agreeing as ever, but the pangs of jealousy which, spite of herself, had tortured the elder lady, were assuaged.

The post brought also a note from Miss Fetherstone inviting the Liscarrick party to luncheon, and admonishing the young people to bring their skates, for the frost had increased in intensity, and there was every indication that the ice on the Priory pond would bear.

There was much overhauling of derelict skates and fitting of straps, for such occasions come but rarely in Ireland, and must be promptly seized when they appear.

Gerald and his nephew were engaged in this

occupation when the latter remarked, "Good job O'Hara is laid up, and won't be louting around here for some time to come. The only pity is that beast of a bullock didn't dash his brains out when it was about it."

For Bob fully accepted the O'Hara version of the accident. Indeed, he had not been told of his sister's adventure at all.

"It might have simplified matters," agreed Gerald, smiling, as he recalled the real cause of the Squireen's injuries, "but I think you'll find he'll live to plague us yet. And bear in mind there are not many days to run before that big note of ours falls due."

"Oh, they'll renew," remarked Bob, with his usual optimism.

"Bob, you're incorrigible!" exclaimed his uncle. "There's nothing gained by renewing. The debt only grows bigger, and has to be paid in the end. No sign of an offer for the horse, I suppose?"

"Not a nibble," replied Bob, morosely. This was a sore subject with him. Under pressure he had agreed to sell the animal if a reasonable price could be obtained, but secretly he believed in it as much as ever, and took no active steps to find a purchaser.

"Surely, if the brute is worth anything at all someone would make some kind of offer," said Gerald, impatiently. "I'll put in an advertisement."

"Don't do that," cried his nephew, apprehensively. "That's the sure way to make little of him. Who ever heard of a thoroughbred adver-

tised for sale like a shire mare. Better wait our chance, it's sure to come."

"There's one thing surer to come," retorted the other, "and that's the day our note will be presented, and, so far as I can see, protested."

"Look here, uncle mine; do be reasonable. Here's a hard frost; the roads are like glass, the ground is like iron. I daren't take Liscarrick out of the yard to show him—let alone sell him. And we must get our price for him, and a bit more. It will take well over sixteen hundred to clear us as it is. Sell him at a loss, and we're worse off than ever."

"I could make up some part of it," said Gerald, gloomily, and relapsed into silence. He had a keener appreciation of Bob's selfishness than he had had a month before. If the transaction were to do again, so he told himself, his signature would be lacking.

There's another thing," he presently resumed. "This business of your mother's. That must be stopped."

"Rather," assented his nephew, vaguely, but with emphasis.

"Now, attend to me," Gerald went on. 'I want you to ask O'Hara to the tenant's spree on Thursday."

"Ask O'Hara!" repeated Bob, astonished. Then, after a considerable pause, "Molly won't like that."

"Of course she won't. For the matter of that, none of us'll like it. But he's got to be invited and made much of, just the same!"

"All right," replied Bob, "I know you have

some game up to dish the beggar, but hang me if I understand it."

"It isn't necessary that you should. Only be as nice as pie to him. We might even have him to dinner that night. Jove, that's a good idea," cried Gerald, with something like enthusiasm. "The longer we have him with us the better."

"Can't say I agree with you," growled Bob. "However, have it your own way. We'll ask him to dinner, and what then?"

"That's simple. See that all the decanters are full, and don't be shy to push them round," answered his uncle. "They say that Mat O'Hara is drunk every night of his life. Your mother has never seen him so. Let us try if her sensibilities will stand the spectacle."

"Faith, that's a ripping fine idea," exclaimed Bob. "If there's one thing the mater can't endure it's a drunken man."

"I can quite believe that," answered Gerald, who remembered that his brother had been a convivial soul, and not always the pleasantest company in his cups.

"When Mat's drunk he's a holy terror. I've seen him many a time," remarked Bob. Then, as a thought struck him, he fell suddenly grave. "But what if that bullock has mauled him so he can't get around?"

"Oh, he'll be right enough before Christmas," answered Gerald lightly. "I don't believe the bullock in question did more than enough to spoil his beauty for a few days."

"I don't know," said the other doubtfully,

"some of those beasts are vicious enough to kill a man."

"I'm afraid this one stopped short of that extremity," laughed Gerald. "But if he can't come Christmas, we'll put the whole fandango off till New Year. We've got to have him. It's our last chance, and, I believe, a good one."

Bob mused on this pronouncement, and then his thoughts turned again to "the little harse." He believed it would be sheer madness to sell, and yet his uncle was immovable. Well, so far, the evil day had been postponed, and who could say what luck the future might hold for him.

The big clock in the hall, chiming the quarters preparatory to striking, interrupted his meditations.

"Time we started," he observed. "We'll have to hoof it, you know. None of the horses are cocked."

"I'm ready," said Gerald, slinging the skate straps over his shoulder. "Where are Jack and Molly?"

"Gone half an hour ago; and the mater isn't coming, so we may as well make a move. I say," Bob continued, as they swung down the avenue at a good pace, "you've heard about that pair? Molly and Jack, I mean?"

"I have," answered his uncle. "Jack told me last night. Are you pleased?" he added, with some curiosity.

"Rather," answered Bob. "He seems a right good sort, and it's about the best thing could have happened for Molly. She hasn't exactly a rosy time of it here."

"I quite agree," said Gerald, rather bitterly, as he reflected how little her brother had done to lighten his sister's burdens, and how much, albeit indirectly and unconsciously, he had added to them.

"Molly is in luck," pursued Bob.

"She is," assented Gerald, "and so is Jack Whalen."

They stepped briskly out, their footsteps ringing clear on the frosty road, for they were ambitious to accomplish the distance within the hour if possible. And as they walked they elaborated the details of the contemplated exposure of O'Hara.

"For remember, Bob," his uncle said, "that this is the last chance—the last for me, at any rate. I can't stay on here for ever. I'll have to be making tracks in a few weeks."

"Where to?" asked Bob.

"Back to San Francisco, of course."

"What for?"

"To earn my living, laddie, which I had started in to do before I was your age."

"Yes, I know," said Bob. "You have brains and all that. I haven't." He felt aggrieved at his uncle's announcement, and viewed the prospect of being compelled to face his own difficulties unaided with anything but satisfaction. "I don't see the good of it," he remarked, after some minutes of inward self-communing. "You've money enough."

"For the moment, my boy," said his uncle lightly. "But you know well enough that I'm no millionaire, and other people know it by this time, I should hope."

"Not from me," muttered Bob, inaudibly, who, indeed, had spared no pains to spread the fiction of his uncle's wealth wherever he found an opportunity. "Not from me, and I hope you've had the sense to keep your own head shut."

But this was not meant for Gerald's ears, nor did it reach them, and the two passed through the stately gates of the old Priory without discussing the subject further.

CHAPTER XIV.

"I SHALL NEVER FORGET THIS EVENING."

BRIGHT sunshine, pure invigorating air, and ice in perfect condition had combined to make Miss Fetherstone's skating party an emphatic success. The young people from the Rectory were there, and a few more—considering the depleted condition of the neighbourhood, it was quite a considerable gathering; but no one ever refused an invitation to the Priory, however short the notice. All day the picturesque banks of the pond had echoed merry laughter and ceaseless chaff, and the ice-imprisoned Undine in the depths had hummed a welcome to the steel-shod feet which had never ceased to plough its frozen surface. Even now, when the afternoon was fast giving place to night, and stars began to twinkle here and there in the darkening blue above, enthusiastic skaters were still pursuing each other in games, or taking station for quadrilles on the smooth, grey ice.

Kate and Gerald were slowly climbing the steep path that led up to the house. She looked very handsome, a tall graceful figure in her furs, and recent exercise had given to her cheeks the touch of colour which they sometimes lacked.

Gerald walked beside her, swinging a pair of skates in either hand. Earlier in the day he had found opportunity to acquaint her with the recent occurrences at Liscarrick, but their conversation

had been interrupted and fragmentary, as occasion served. Now he had given her the whole tale, beginning with the Squireen's proposal to Mrs. Delaney, and going on to Molly's adventure on the Bog road, and her understanding, as yet unannounced, with Jack Whalen.

Miss Fetherstone was deeply concerned. She was genuinely delighted at the news of Molly's engagement to her cousin, and was already considering in her warm heart what she could do to make smoother their path for the young lovers, but Mrs. Delaney's position and the attitude she assumed moved her at once to pity and to anger.

"It's incredible!" she cried hotly. "That a woman in your sister-in-law's position could stoop to even *think* of such a creature as O'Hara. Why, the man drinks, if there were nothing else."

"I don't think Emmie knows that," said Gerald.

"But she's bound to find it out, sooner or later."

"Yes," he assented, "she's bound to find it out, and if I can manage it, it will be sooner, not later."

"You haven't told her, then?"

"Of O'Hara's drinking habits? Yes, I have," he replied, "but there's no use telling Emmie anything about the man. She won't believe you, unless it is proved to demonstration, and even then she doubts. Look at the way the brute treated Molly. Yet nothing will persuade her that O'Hara had anything to do with it."

"Poor Molly," sighed Kate pitifully, and then fell silent for a moment. She more than half envied the girl, even while she commiserated her. Wooed for herself, won for herself, with a future of hope and struggle, of love and happiness before her; would such—could such ever be her own destiny? The shadow of the great distillery seemed to fall across her path, and her mood darkened with the darkening twilight. Half involuntarily she spoke her mind.

"Yet I don't see why I should say 'Poor Molly.' Hers promises to be a very happy future."

"I think so," assented Gerald. "She's a good little girl, and Jack's a real good sort. They will be hard up, of course," he continued meditatively, "for a while, at any rate."

"That's it," Kate broke in impetuously. "They have chosen each other just for love. There's no other possible reason. That's why I'm sure they'll be happy. That's why I envy Molly."

Gerald by this time knew his companion in most of her moods, and he saw that she was verging perilously on the morbid. He had seen her in this vein more than once, and did not hesitate to speak out.

"Drop it," he said lightly, "I know where you're drifting to and I won't have it. You are jolly well off, and your position is the envy of thousands. Every shoe pinches, and only the wearer knows where, but in my opinion that old shoemaker, Fate, has provided you with an extra comfortable fit."

Kate laughed, a little ruefully.

"Of course you're right—as right as anyone can be who has looked at a thing from one side only, and that the outside. Well, here it is, stated plainly. I've got money, Molly has got love. Which of us is the more likely to be happy?"

"Your turn will come," he said, "I never saw a woman less likely to go through the world loveless."

With all his restraint he felt that his voice vibrated with intensity, and she noticed it too.

She answered him lightly.

"I haven't come to my time of life without encountering lovers, I assure you. I have had dozens, and they were one and all devoted—to my stocks and shares."

"You're incorrigible," laughed Gerald. "You will insist on finding crumples in your rose leaves."

"Come, hadn't we better go indoors," Kate said abruptly. "They'll be wondering where we are."

"Not yet," he remonstrated.

Kate laughed. "Well, it is pleasant here, and I'll try to talk rationally without airing my crochets. Tell me about yourself, your life must have been full of interest. You went to America when you were quite a boy, didn't you?"

"Just turned twenty," answered Gerald a little wistfully. Few men can think of their vanished youth without a tinge of regret for it.

"Ah, that is a career I can respect," exclaimed Kate impulsively. "To face the world

in the first flush of life—a man among men! To force it to accept you and accord you the place you win by your own exertion! It must be glorious."

"Do you think so? To sneak downstairs on tip-toe of a morning, hoping to escape a meeting with the landlady, yet fully conscious that you'll find her waiting for you on your return, with the eternal question, 'are you going to pay me that six dollars, or are you not?'"

"I see," she answered thoughtfully. 'Money has it's uses after all, but success comes at last —comes through your own efforts. That is where I envy you men. What a triumph that must be."

"By the time success comes—if it comes—" Gerald answered slowly, "I think one is generally too tired for such a vivid sensation as triumph. Satisfaction, yes, and relief from the long tension."

"But your homecoming," she insisted. "Surely that made amends."

"What a homecoming!" Gerald answered with a laugh full of bitterness. "Fancy coming back to Liscarrick to encounter a nightmare like O'Hara. Ruin has come to many an Irish house in these times, but surely it never came in such an objectionable shape as this."

It had grown quite dark and they were still pacing up and down the terrace. But now, sifting silver through the leafless beech boughs, a faint radiance whitened the gloom. The moon was rising. And from far down the path they had just climbed came the sound of laughing

voices. The skaters were coming up from the pond.

Kate had returned no answer to Gerald's outburst. In truth she did not know what to say. She was deeply sympathetic, but found no words. It was very, very hard on him.

"It will be very rough on Bob," she said at last.

"Bob!" echoed Gerald. "I have no sympathy for him. It was he who brought this blight on us first. Poor little Molly! She's the one I pity.'

"Molly will marry soon and leave it all," said Kate. "That was a swift wooing. Do you believe in love at first sight?"

"I can't say I do," he answered. "A good woman is worthy of something better than such an explosive affection. Jack saw quite enough of Molly to know her value before he spoke. I don't believe a real love can spring up full grown at sight of a pretty face."

"The poets are against you there," she smiled.

"Of course; they are always against the facts. Poets idealize, nature realizes. They speak from sentiment, I, from experience.

"Oh, Mr. Delaney, have you been in love? This grows most interesting. Do tell me."

"I didn't mean that," said Gerald awkwardly. "I should not have said I spoke from experience. Observation is the word I meant to use."

"That's a mean way to get out of it," she retorted, scanning his face in the growing light,

for the moon was beginning to show above the trees. "Come, I hold you to your experience, let us have it."

"I have had but one experience," Gerald answered gravely, yet with a hint of suppressed passion in his voice. "It is very recent. Some day I may tell you all about it."

She moved away from him and drew her furs closer about her with a little shiver.

"Don't you think we had better go indoors," she said. "Surely it is growing colder."

The bright vivacity of her manner had vanished and Gerald felt the chill of the change more than the nip of the frosty air. But he persevered.

"Oh, don't go in yet. You can't be cold, wrapped up like that."

She was a creature of moods, many and varied.

"It is a perfect moon," she said, and her tone had changed again. "I'm enjoying the evening, I confess. Sometimes everything seems perfect, and presently again nothing pleases me. And they are the self same things, too. Atmospheric, I suppose.

"'I feel that I am happy, that for me
A livelier emerald sparkles in the grass,
A purer sapphire melts into the sea,'"

quoted Gerald. "After all, there's no sky like the sky above one's old home. How I shall miss it all."

"Are you leaving us then?" she asked, and he listened for a note of regret in her tone, but could not detect it. She spoke gravely, however.

"Yes," I must return to San Francisco very soon," he replied after a pause.

"I wonder will you remember this evening when you are in California again," she said. "That sky, I mean, and the woods, and the beautiful frosty air."

"I shall never forget this evening," he replied earnestly. "It will be one of my cherished memories."

She took alarm again.

"I wonder if you will," she said, speaking quite lightly. "It will be an effort of memory if you do. You don't have frost in San Francisco, do you?"

"I have never seen any," he answered, speaking steadily.

"Well, if you won't come in, I must," and she ran up the steps. "I'm a pretty hostess. Everyone is in before me. Fortunately there is always Mrs. Purvis." She stood on the top step and looked down at him. "Aren't you coming? Tea's in this long time, you know."

"Thanks, he answered stiffly, "I'll be in directly."

"And I have had such a happy, happy day," she said softly. "I shall remember it better than you will for I shall have the trees and the pond and the dear old Priory before me still when your scene has changed."

Gerald fancied he caught a touch of wistfulness in her voice and stepped impulsively forward, but she had vanished into the house. He stopped, biting his lip.

"She's not for me," he mused. "What a

woman she is! Never five minutes in the same mood. Sometimes I think she cares for me, but at a hint she turns to ice. Why is she so monstrously rich? I declare I hate her money as much as she does. She'll never let any man woo her and, for one, I shall never muster up courage to try."

He came slowly up the steps, pausing to glance in at the lighted room where Kate stood. She had thrown her furs on a chair and was bending over the tea equipage, laughing brightly, and apparently offering gay apologies for her tardy arrival.

"And yet I love her," he said to himself, "and if I thought she'd believe me, faith I think I'd dare to tell her so."

And he followed her in to tea.

CHAPTER XV.

A Dinner Party at Liscarrick.

Old Larry was jubilant as he superintended the delivery of several dozen bottles of Irish whiskey bearing the well known label of the Shamrock Blend; also a barrel of porter and many other good things. As he signed the railway receipt and feasted his eyes on the goodly show they made ranged in the stone passage, he felt that the old days had come back again to Liscarrick at last.

Mrs. Kilkelly, too, was very busy and important. The credit of the house depended on her, and she determined to maintain it worthily. For, to use her own words, "'Miss Molly had no more interest nor an unhatched gosling in what came or what went, since she tuk to courtin.'"

So Mrs. Kilkelly summoned her staff around her and marshalled them with all the skill of which she was mistress, for this was the day of Gerald's tenants' ball.

Judy, a pretty girl, whose chronic toothache seemed to be in abeyance for this occasion at least, was the first to feel the rigour of the old woman's tongue.

"Is it go out? Go out this day! Well, I like yer impidence. Sorra fut ye stir out if all the world was waitin' for ye. Everything to do an' not a soul but meself to do it."

Poor Judy humbly represented that this was her 'afternoon out,' secured to her by solemn treaty and immemorial usage, but the old lady was adamant.

"Afternoon out or afternoon in, it's here ye'll stick an' do yer work. Troth, when I was yer age, its ashamed I'd be to go gallivantin' after any bachelor. Troth an' I would."

"I'm afther no bachelor," retorted Judy hotly, stung to rebellion by this taunt, "but its a poor case if a poor girl can't go to the chapel to her duties without havin' the likes of that said to her."

"Yer duties!" echoed Mrs Kilkelly, with withering scorn. "Yer duties! Its mighty religious ye're gettin' all of a sudden! Chapel indeed. It's a chapel with chimneys on it, I'm thinkin.' Lave me way now; I've no time to be listenin' to you. Away wid ye, Judy Duggan, yerself an' Maggie, an' don't lave a speck of dust in dinin' room nor hall; an' sure ye're losing nothing stayin' in. He'll be here himself to-night, an' ye can dance rings round the pair of ye. Away wid yez now."

And having carried her point, as she usually did, the old lady heaved a sigh and looked round for fresh worlds to conquer.

Larry was the next to attract her notice—Larry scurrying from room to room in quest of the plate basket which he had laid down somewhere to superintend the unloading of the drinkables and could find nowhere.

"Arrah, man," she began, "what ails ye at all, running round like a chicken with its head

cut off. Can't ye find anything to do."

"Ah will ye not be botherin' me," snapped Larry, as irritable as most people are when they have unaccountably mislaid an article they need. "Its not anything to do I'm lookin' for. It's the plate basket."

"Glory be! Have ye lost that? Ye unfortunate kithogue, an' the quality comin' to dinner."

"Don't I know it?" cried Larry in desperation, "and this is the day of all days I'd take to lose that misforthinate basket. Ye'd be betther helpin' me find it, ma'am, than hinderin' me this way."

"Who's hinderin' ye," retorted Mrs. Kilkelly, angrily. She spied the object of Larry's search under the scullery table and drew it out "Here's yer basket, sittin' foreninst yer nose an' not a word out of it. If it was much nearer ye it'd bite ye, ye misforthinate bothered ould bat."

The butler's irritation passed away like breath from a mirror. He seized his treasure eagerly.

"Ah then, thank ye kindly, ma'am. Its yerself has the quick eye. Nothen' passes ye."

But Mrs. Kilkelly had by no means done with him yet, and proceeded to justify her reputation for acumen in a manner less welcome to Larry. Setting her arms akimbo she stared at him for a full minute, and then, approaching her face to his, exclaimed:

"I seen it. I smell it off ye. What a day ye must take to go an' get drunk."

"I'm not drunk," protested the badgered butler. "Tare an' ages, woman, that tongue of yours wouldn't lave a bit of skin on a man's character the size of a bee's knee."

"Don't I tell ye I smell it off ye," she persisted.

"I'm not denyin' I had a drop. Sure it'd be a poor thing if I wouldn't drink Master Gerald's health a day like this, an' it afther comin' in, six dozen bottles of it."

"If ye're drunk this night, an' you waitin' at table——" began the old lady impressively, but Larry cut her short.

"Ah! don't be annoyin' me, listenin' to ye," he shouted, and ambled off with his burden, leaving Mrs. Kilkelly mistress of the field.

The evening opened with little promise of enjoyment. Dinner passed off quietly, almost gloomily, though it was long since so large a party had met at Liscarrick. It had been Gerald's intention to ask O'Hara only, but Kate Fetherstone had written to Mrs. Delaney begging dinner also for herself and Mrs. Purvis.

The latter lady, an Englishwoman, had lived at the Priory for several years, but was as far as ever from growing accustomed to the Irish character and Irish ways. She could not understand them; even Bob was beyond her, Molly was an enigma, and as for O'Hara, he simply bewildered her. She sat in stony silence throughout the meal, answering in monosyllables when spoken to, and, as Jack Whalen afterwards remarked "never opening her mouth except to put a bit into it."

Mrs. Delaney was nervous and uncomfortable, and occupied herself in sending deprecatory glances, first in the direction of her brother-in-law, then in that of her affianced. She felt as a timid lion tamer might feel if placed between two beasts whose temper she thoroughly mistrusted.

Molly was utterly miserable. She experienced a physical repulsion in O'Hara's presence which she took no pains to conceal. Even O'Hara himself, though quite unconscious of having overstepped the limits of playful gallantry in his passages with Molly, felt ill at ease in surroundings too refined to be wholly congenial to him. One of his eyes, too, was in that parti-coloured transition state through which a severe bruise passes before it disappears; and though this was ostensibly attributed to the foot of the bullock and commiserated accordingly, the squireen was well aware that there was one in company, and he doubted there might be others, who knew better.

After the ladies had withdrawn things brightened. O'Hara, who frankly confessed that he was two or three glasses under the mark, began to mellow in the sunshine of the swiftly passing decanters. Both Gerald and Bob exerted themselves to be agreeable, while Jack gave himself up to unrestrained enjoyment, looking forward to an evening's gaiety of a kind quite new to his experience.

"About this hour," remarked O'Hara, "I most generally do quit cowld wather. I find that the contents of a kettle, wid a sprig of

lemon, brings out the flavour betther."

"Hear, hear!" cheered Gerald. "Bob, ring the bell and have in the materials."

"An' while we're waitin' for them, there's a deal of vartue in a small drop just as nature made it," continued the Squireen, pouring out and tossing off a wineglassful of the neat spirit.

"We may as well have some more whiskey while we're about it," Bob remarked. "This decanter's not much use to anybody."

"Ye're right, it isn't," said O'Hara. "I've no use at all for a decanter: I'd rather have my whack out of the bottle they make it in. I don't like yer decanters. They're mane things. It's like measurin' the dose."

"Some decanters hold more than bottles," remarked Jack.

"Not when I've done wid them," rejoined Mat, with an elaborate wink, which seemed to play among the greens and yellows of his injured eye with an effect so comical that the others lay back in their chairs and actually yelled with laughter. Mat, convinced that he had said something very good, laughed too.

Jack was the first to recover.

"Don't overegg the pudding, old man," he whispered to Gerald, eyeing O'Hara.

"Never fear," replied his friend in the same tone. "He's a seasoned vessel."

"What are you two connubiatin' about?" cried the Squireen.

"Jack here is proposing to join the ladies, but surely it's not come to that yet," replied Gerald.

"Don't mind him. Sure he's in love! Not but what I'm in love myself," O'Hara continued, recollecting himself and regarding Whalen fiercely; "as much in love as ever ye'll dar to be; but we're in no hurry for the ladies. The materials is ordered."

"We've heaps of time," remarked Bob.

"Heaps! Ye're right, me boy. But I'm always ready to drink any lady's health, present or absent," Mat continued, filling his glass, "Here's to the brightest eyes in Liscarrick an' every one can think of them shining in the head he likes best."

He drained his glass, and the others, rising to honour the toast, had much ado to restrain their laughter, so ill did the man's sentimental expression match his discoloured optic. But he noticed nothing.

"Lovely eyes never yet quenched the flow of good liquor," he concluded, setting down his empty glass.

"This lovely frost has effectually quelled the flow of hunting," observed Gerald. "Over a week of it now and no sign of a thaw. One might as well be in Canada."

"I'm finding it next to impossible to keep Liscarrick in proper exercise," remarked Bob. "The colt is getting beyond himself."

"I always towld ye ye were playin' the divil wid that little harse," said O'Hara spitefully. "Ye'll have him as thick as a bullock afore the spring."

"Well, I'd like to know how you're going to exercise him this weather," cried Bob, taking

fire at once. "Maybe you'd have him out, frost or no frost."

"Ye ought to have a tan gallop laid down for him," retorted the other.

"Perhaps you'd like to pay for it," snapped Bob.

"Faix, I've ped all I want to over that harse already."

"You'll get your money," said Bob hotly.

"I'll go bail I will—an' no thanks to you neither," retorted the Squireen.

"Bob, Bob," remonstrated his uncle, laying his hand on the young fellow's arm and giving it a significant squeeze; "what a topic to start after dinner. I'm ashamed of you."

"O'Hara knows his money is perfectly safe," answered Bob, calming down at once as he remembered the role he was expected to play. "There isn't a faster horse in Ireland."

"Begob, then, I wish you'd sent him for the whiskey," said Mat quizzically, "for ould Larry is mortal slow."

At this moment the butler entered with the "materials," and harmony was restored.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Tenants' Ball.

There was little time for conversation when the gentlemen entered the drawing room, for fiddles were already scraping and the drone of the pipes, like the subdued hum of many bees, floated in from the hall.

It was a bright scene. The big chandelier was lighted and shed the soft radiance of scores of wax candles on the groups of merrymakers—the women attired in all their finery, gay colours prevailing, the men mostly wearing the picturesque costume of the Irish peasantry.

The dark oak of the old hall was handsomely relieved by the decorations of the season. Ivy and glistening holly leaves, picked out with clusters of their own scarlet berries, nestled around the ancestral portraits or twined lovingly in and out of the balustrades of the great staircase. At the upper end sat the musicians—two fiddlers and a piper—and refreshment tables had been spread with a liberal hand in the porch as well as in the dining room. Certainly Gerald had done the thing well.

A ringing cheer greeted the entrance of the house party, and the festivities were soon in full swing.

A quadrille, more or less a set function, inaugurated the proceedings. Gerald opened the

ball with Mrs. Kilkelly; Mat O'Hara led out Mrs. Delaney. Though his gestures were free and his tongue glib, the jealous eyes that watched him could detect no unsteadiness in his movements.

Old Larry's bashful invitation to Miss Fetherstone met with a frank and ready response, but Bishop's grave request for the honour of Mrs. Purvis's hand for the quadrille, was repulsed with a stony stare and an unqualified negative. Molly danced with Nolan, and Bob selected as his partner the pretty French maid from the Priory.

But the quadrille was only an appetiser for the more highly seasoned dishes to follow. Reels and jigs rapidly succeeded each other; all was romp and gaiety and good fellowship. A strong dance, in which each couple sought to wear down the others had ended, after nearly half an hour's strenuous competition, in a complete triumph for Judy and her rustic swain. Now the participants, exhausted for the moment, sank breathless on the benches or leaned against the walls.

Gerald, who with most of the house party occupied a position on the stairs, observed this and set himself to devise a new pastime for his guests.

"I'll get Doherty, the piper, to sing us a song," he said. "That will give them time to get their second wind."

As he passed down the hall, he directed the attention of sundry stragglers to the porch, whither a strong tide of thirsty souls was already

setting. Glancing into the dining room, he noticed O'Hara busy with the refreshments there. He had missed him soon after the quadrille, and the flushed face and loud tones of the Squireen, as he talked and drank amid a small group of farmers, told their own story. Gerald's only fear was that he would remain in the dining room till the ladies had retired and so escape Emmie's notice altogether.

Revolving various schemes for drawing Mat from his lair, and yet loath to disturb him till he was, as one might say, fully ripe, he reached the Piper and preferred his request.

"A song, Masther Gerald," answered the man of the chaunters, who sat, one arm embracing his pipes while the other toyed with a frothing pot of porter. "Deed an' ye desarve it, sir. If I was lark an' nightingale in one I'd sing to ye day an' night. What sort of a song would ye be choosing now?"

Gerald glanced up the hall to where Kate stood half way up the stairs—a tall, graceful figure in a shimmering robe of some black material from which her snowy neck and arms shone out the whiter by contrast. He turned to Doherty.

"Have you such a thing as a song about a fool who loved a girl so much that he was afraid to tell her so?"

"Deed, an' I have, sir."

"Sing it then," And Gerald feasted his eyes from a distance, while the Piper, after a few preliminary flourishes on his instrument, passed into a plaintive old Irish air and sang,

tunefully enough, in a quavering high tenor:—

"There's a decent little shebeen at the foot of the boreen,
An' its lucky that my holding lies so near;
It isn't altogether on account of the potheen
Nor by reason of the porter an' the beer.
'Tis because of a young colleen that fills up the glasses there—
Boys dear, but its herself is pure an' sweet;
With the white dawn on her forehead and the midnight in her hair,
An' as light as a young colt upon her feet."

II.

Her spakin' voice is sweeter than another woman sings,
An' her blush is like the bud upon the briar,
She gives a taste like honey to the liquor that she brings,
An' the eyes of her would set a man afire.
She's kinder than the angels that come sometimes in my dreams,
She's fairer than the sunset on the snow.
I've never dared to ask her—never asked her, for it seems
I couldn't live at all if she said 'No.'"

"Thank you, Doherty," Gerald said when the applause that followed the song had died out. "You'll never want a set of pipes while you've that in your throat. Why your pewter's empty. Somebody fetch Doherty another pot of porter." As he turned away he added. "Give them

Sir Roger; the ladies have had about enough of it, I fancy. You can have the Cushion Dance after they go."

Kate was full of the song when Gerald rejoined her.

"What a charming old air! And the words have a pretty fancy. They're not a bit natural, though. I can't imagine a man loving a girl like that and not daring to tell her so. Can you?"

"I can, quite," Gerald answered shortly. Why did she lead him on in this way and then turn cold directly her invitation was accepted?"

"Oh, well, men know best, I suppose," she said lightly. "I'm sure, if I wanted anything as much as all that I shouldn't be afraid to ask for it."

Gerald turned suddenly, hot words on his lips, but the situation was all against him. Molly and Jack, close beside him, might have been a hundred miles away for all the attention they paid him, or any one but themselves, and Mrs. Delaney was wistfully scanning the moving throng below in search of her Mat; but Mrs. Purvis, a step or two higher up, kept her eyes on his face.

"Besides," Kate went on as he remained silent, "she was a barmaid or something of the kind, I gathered—the girl in the song, I mean. In the whiskey trade like myself," she added bitterly. "I don't see that the lover need have been so punctilious."

Oh, to be alone with her for five minutes while this mood was on her! He glanced at

Mrs. Purvis, who was watching them unwinking, and replied,

"I don't think he was over punctilious. Merely in love, and sensitively alive to his own demerits, as all similarly afflicted are."

"There's Sir Roger," cried Molly suddenly. "They'll have the Cushion Dance after this. Uncle Gerald, mayn't we wait and see it?"

"Better not, dear. It isn't usual," he answered.

"Why not?" asked Kate, her curiosity all aflame as she sniffed a faint odour of forbidden fruit.

"It's not considered etiquette, dear, for ladies to wait for," explained Mrs. Delaney. "You see its a kind of carnival when ordinary rules are relaxed."

"It's simply a country frolic," explained Gerald. "The band plays 'The White Cockade,' or some such rubbish, and a man goes round with a cushion and lays it at the feet of his chosen one, and kneels on it. She is supposed to drop on her knees, too, and he kisses her. Then she takes the cushion and makes her own selection among the men, and so on ad infinitum. It's a sort of Irish version of kiss-in-the-ring."

"Oh, but it sounds charming," cried Kate. "I certainly shan't go till I have seen it."

"Quite right, Kate," approved Molly. "They always hunt the ladies away before it begins. I've never seen it, but its the biggest fun of it all, I know."

"Why do they hunt the ladies away?" asked Kate, turning to Gerald.

"Well, you see," he replied awkwardly, "if you're here you're supposed to be taking part in the dance, just as you did in the quadrilles, you know. And if someone were to lay the cushion at your feet——"

"I should get kissed, I suppose. What fun!" interrupted she.

"No," said he gravely, "that happens when you lay the cushion at someone else's feet. In the former case you have to kiss."

"Gerald dear, how can you?" cried his sister-in-law reprovingly. Mrs. Purvis's face was set in a mask of horror. Kate was laughing.

"What about the men?" she asked. "Aren't they afraid of being kissed?"

"Men don't mind that sort of thing so much," explained Mrs. Delaney.

"Ah, men have many privileges," Kate remarked, counterfeiting a sigh, "it must be nice to be a man."

At this provocation Mrs. Purvis found her voice.

"Kate, dear! ! ! ! "

"Now, Mrs. Purvis," replied, in impish mood, the lady so adjured, "you know you'd like it yourself."

A faint scream was the only possible reply to this monstrous insinuation, and Mrs. Purvis made it.

"So you think, Mrs. Delaney, men don't mind being kissed?" continued the irrepresssible Kate.

"I suppose not, dear," replied the widow.

"And you, Mr. Delaney. Is it chivalrous of you to shelter behind us poor women. Down with you and defend the stair. But wait. Tell me—Do you hope to preserve your virgin cheek?"

"I'm afraid not. You know I am supposed to be the host to-night. I shall be expected to open the proceedings," he replied.

"And is it one of the host's duties to kiss the girls? I can imagine you quite proficient. Well I suppose we had better go, we poor women. The spectacle might be too much for weak nerves."

"If you really wish to wait, Miss Featherstone," said Gerald, who, in truth, did not know how to take her, "keep on the stairs here and everyone will understand you are not dancing. You will see it all, and its all very innocent."

And he ran down the hall.

"Oh, do stay, Kate, and then I can too," pleaded Molly.

"You will, of course, please yourself, dear," said Mrs. Purvis, stiffly. "Personally, I think I should prefer to withdraw."

"Dear Mrs. Purvis, with ordinary precaution, and if you will promise to discard that too fascinating smile, I will undertake to ensure your safety. Just two steps higher, please, and behind me."

"There's 'The White Cockade,'" cried Jack, "and there's Gerald with his cushion. Now look out. The fun's going to commence."

CHAPTER XVII.

The Cushion Dance.

The centre of the hall was clear, and the dancers were ranged along the sides, in some places thinly, at others in denser groups, where some maiden, in real or affected coyness, had drawn into the background, using her fellows as a screen. There was much pushing forward and pulling back, and a ripple of giggles rising and falling, and at times almost drowning the music. Down the whole length of the great hall stalked Gerald, serene and unsmiling, cushion in hand, a modern Paris weighing well his judgment ere he bestowed the apple.

Tense interest enthralled the little group on the stairs as it watched. Molly struck a discordant note when she exclaimed:

"I declare if he hasn't got one of the best drawing room cushions. Isn't he extravagant."

"Never mind the cushion," Kate said impatiently. "I'm dying to see what he'll do with it. There are any amount of pretty girls to choose from. Oh," she cried. "His old nurse! I call that a swindle."

For Gerald had deposited the cushion at Mrs. Kilkelly's feet and dropped on his knees.

But though she affected to be disappointed at Gerald's choice, Kate's interest did not wane. She clapped her hands and laughed aloud when the old nurse selected the Priory butler for her partner.

"She's chosen Bishop," she cried. "Now I

wonder how he'll manage. If he goes down on his knees he'll never be able to get up. Isn't he a pompous old dear. Now its his turn. I'm dying to see what he'll do. Oh, look! Trust Bishop. He has taste."

For Bishop had dropped his cushion before Peggy Rafferty, probably the prettiest girl in the room, and subsided, with some difficulty, at her feet.

"Hospitality to the foreigner," remarked Jack, critically inspecting the embrace which rewarded the butler. "I've a good mind to go down and try my luck."

"Do," said Molly mischievously, "let us both go. I'll show you the way."

Jack stayed where he was.

The fun below waxed fast and furious. The presence of the house party, which at first had operated as a check on the more boisterous elements, was quite forgotten, and though the rules of the game were strictly observed, knots of boys and girls, laughing and cheering, surrounded each couple as they embraced, insisting that the forfeit should be honestly paid and permitting no shirking. The party on the stairs, which had been rejoined by Gerald, was weary with laughter, provoked every moment by some new incident below, and Kate was beginning to lend a more favourable ear to the repeated hints of Mrs. Purvis that it was "surely time to order the carriage, dear," when a sudden shout from the lower part of the hall arrested everyone's attention.

"Hurroo for the luck of the O'Hara's! A

cushion dance, begorrah! I'm in it up to me neck."

The Squireen was standing in the doorway of the dining room, swaying on his feet, flushed, loutish, all the animal beauty of his face quenched in liquor—drunk and unashamed!

Mrs. Delaney drew back from the balustrade. Then she pressed forward again as if unable to take her eyes off him. Larry chanced to be passing below. She leaned down and spoke to him.

"What's the matter with Mr. O'Hara, Larry? Is he ill?"

"Sorra taste, ma'am. Only drunk," replied the matter of fact servant.

Mrs. Delaney turned very pale, but she still kept her eyes on the scene below as if it possessed some horrible fascination for her. The others watched her in silence.

O'Hara lurched forward. The dance had stopped abruptly as everyone turned, startled by his shout. The cushion lay where the last holder had dropped it, and he stumbled over it, almost pitching on his head. Recovering himself, he grabbed it up and stood looking round him with swimming, bloodshot eyes.

"Three cheers for ould Ireland!" he screamed. "Play it up, Piper."

He staggered forward a few steps still holding the cushion. "Where the blazes are all the pretty girls? Oh, here's one."

He flopped down on his knees before Judy Duggan, and seizing her by the waist tried to pull her down to him. She screamed and strug-

gled, and O'Hara, losing his balance rolled over on his side dragging the girl to the ground.

Ominous murmurs arose from the hall. "For shame!" "That's no fair dancing," and the like.

"This will never do," cried Gerald, and dashed down the stairs.

"I'll have me kiss," insisted the Squireen thickly. "It's my cushion."

There was an unseemly struggle on the floor, but before Gerald, closely followed by Bob, could reach the spot, O'Hara had been dragged clear by a stalwart young labourer, Judy's intended, and the girl, flushed and dishevelled, helped to her feet.

Mrs. Delaney, white as paper, sank on the steps, where she sat, pressing her hand to her side.

"Mamma, dear, what's the matter?" cried her daughter. "Are you ill?"

"Sick at heart, Molly. Take me away. Oh, take me away."

"Loathsome beast," muttered Molly, and she assisted her mother upstairs.

The others exchanged glances of consternation.

"I really think it is high time we went home," said Mrs. Purvis at last.

"I quite agree with you," assented Kate. "Jack, you might order the carriage."

All the brightness had gone out of the evening for her. She addressed her maid, who, terrified by the scene below, had crept up a few steps.

"We are going, Celeste, get our wraps, please," and the three women went up together. The stairway was deserted.

Meanwhile, O'Hara lay on his back, speechless and motionless, but grinning feebly, the centre of a group of curious rustics.

"Get him away, Bob, to bed or anywhere you like out of sight," said Gerald hurriedly.

Judging by his own feelings he did not believe that Emmie, or any other woman, could have looked without repulsion at the Squireen as he lay. He felt his plot had succeeded, but he revolted at its consummation.

"Now friends," he began as he reached the end of the hall, "don't you think we've all had enough of this?"

"Ah, yer honour," said Larry, "they're only just beginning to like it. Sure its only the shank of the evening."

Gerald looked round helplessly. Bob was struggling hard to get O'Hara on his feet. Another man had seized the cushion and was carrying it round. A word to the piper stopped that. The music ceased, and the company stood at gaze, waiting for whatever might happen next, but showing no inclination to disperse. Gerald sought Mrs. Kilkelly and whispered his difficulty in her ear.

"Nurse, couldn't you give them a hint to clear out. Nothing to hurt their feelings you know. Just a gentle hint."

Mrs. Kilkelly had her own notion of a gentle hint, and she proceeded to administer one. The event showed that she knew her audience.

"Now, boys and girls," she said, raising her voice. "Ye're here long enough, so just give three cheers for the ladies and gentlemen, not

forgettin' Master Gerald who give yez this trate, an' then away with yez. There's sherry wine in the housekeeper's room for the ladies, an' lashins and lavins of beer and porter for the men in the kitchen. So, three cheers and away with yez now."

"Thank you, nurse," said Gerald, after he had acknowledged the noisy ovation, "that's just what I wanted. A gentle hint, and you gave it them."

By this time Bob, with some assistance, had succeeded in getting O'Hara into the library, where, having settled the now comatose gentleman on the sofa, with a rug and a pillow, he left him to sleep off his potations.

Meanwhile Molly had accompanied her mother to her room and remained with her while she undressed. The girl was very tender-hearted, and Mrs. Delaney's penitent mood touched her deeply, but she was careful not to show overmuch sympathy.

"I'll never see him again," wailed the poor lady; "I couldn't let him come near me. Such a disgrace—such a public disgrace. Lying drunk in my own hall and trying to kiss the scullery maid."

"It's my belief he'd try to kiss the devil if you put him in petticoats," observed Molly.

"Don't be irreverent, dear," corrected her mother. "You are altogether too free in your speech. I wonder was he mad?"

"Mad drunk," replied the girl curtly.

"I'm afraid so. I've seen men drunk before.

I'll never marry a drunkard—no, not if I end my days single."

"I'm thankful you've decided not to marry this one anyhow," answered Molly.

"Never marry a drunkard, whatever you do. Mr. Whalen doesn't drink, I hope?"

"Of course he doesn't, Jack's a gentleman," said her daughter indignantly.

"Ah, but my dear; gentlemen do drink—some of them. But I'll break this off. Write to Mr. O'Hara in the morning—no, I'll write myself. And now, dear, I think I'll try to get a little sleep. I feel very shaken. Kiss me good night, Molly, and give my love to Mrs. Purvis and Kate and beg them to excuse me. Tell them I feel quite upset, and have gone to lie down. And tell Larry I am never at home to Mr. O'Hara at any time he calls. Good night, dear."

Molly returned to the hall with the comfortable conviction that her mother's heart was unaffected, however mortifying to her pride and vanity the Squireen's conduct might have been.

She did not see Kate Fetherstone, who had already gone, but she found her uncle and Jack Whalen smoking, amid the debris of the decorations, in the deserted hall.

"Well?" said Gerald.

"Well," she replied. "Mamma has gone to bed in a very edifying frame of mind, and has forbidden Mat O'Hara the house."

"Glory be! as Mrs. Kilkelly would say," ejaculated Gerald fervently.

"Amen!" responded Molly; and then,

seeing the derelict cushion lying on the floor she picked it up, like the careful housewife she was, and carried it into the drawing room.

"Do you know that you took about the only decent cushion in the house for your horrid game?" she said.

"That was why I selected it, my dear. If you want to do anything, do it as well as you can."

And Jack and Gerald resumed their cigars, and Molly went to bed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Mr. O'Hara Threatens an Action for Breach.

It was nearly a week after Gerald's "fandango," the last day of the old year, in fact, that O'Hara, burning for vengeance, entered Mr. McMaster's office. The Squireen had called several times at Liscarrick in the interval only to be repulsed on each occasion with a curt "not at home" from the delighted Larry. He had even forced his way into the library, and there waited, fuming, for an hour or more. But Mrs. Delaney had locked herself in her room upstairs, and he saw no one.

So, despairing of bringing the widow to a parley by fair means, he determined to consult the attorney with a view to ascertaining if the law could be made to serve his purpose.

The joint note of Bob and Gerald fell due in a few days, and McMaster naturally thought that it was on this business his client had called.

"Good morning, Mr. O'Hara," was the attorney's formal greeting. "You have called in reference to this Liscarrick business, I presume."

"Ye presume right," replied Mat, "I've been badly trated, but them that thinks Mat O'Hara is to be whistled up, and then sent to heel like a damned dog, will find their mistake. I'll larn them."

"But, my dear sir, the note has several days

to run, and there can be no manner of doubt Mr. Gerald Delaney will meet it when due. You have nothing to complain of."

"Nothing to complain of, ain't I," exploded O'Hara, 'I've nothing in life agen Gerald Delaney—he trated me like a gentleman the other night—free spoken an' liberal, an' the whiskey was ten years old if it was a day, an' he seen me safe an' comfortable on the sofa afther it, with a rug up to me chin."

McMaster smiled as he visualised the picture thus presented. The Squireen was the only one of his clients who occasionally tickled his faint sense of humour.

"What the divil are ye grinnin' at?" snapped Mat. 'It's no laughing matter, I tell ye now. The day after the spree comes a note for me from the widow Delaney. I'll read it ye in a minute. Well, back an' forth, accordin' as I had the time, I've been four times to the big house to see her, an' that divil's imp, Larry, stands howldin' the dure an' sayin' "not at home," as if it plazed him to say it. An' I knowin' all the time, as well as if I seen her, that she was stuck in some room within, maybe makin' faces at me from in under the blind. I tell ye, Mac, I'm not goin' to stand it."

"Have you and the lady quarrelled?" asked the attorney, surprised.

"No! If I had would I be botherin' up to see her four days in the week. Its herself has turned rusty, the Lord knows why."

"Pooh, pooh! The quarrels of lovers are the renewal of love," quoted McMaster.

O'Hara fairly danced with rage.

"D'ye think she's the first woman I've courted? D'ye think I don't know the ins and outs of them by this time? Will ye get it through yer thick head that she's strivin' to give me the chuck? Here, read this," and he snatched a letter from his pocket and threw it across the desk to the attorney.

The latter adjusted his glasses and began to read—

"Liscarrick, December 27. Sir,—" he commenced, but O'Hara interrupted him:

"That's how it begins. 'Sir!' An' a few days ago I was her own darlin' Mat. I tell ye, Mac, that unfeeling 'sir' tore up me heart's emotions like a harrow goin' over fresh plough. But read it, read it."

The attorney resumed.

"After the disgraceful exhibition you made of yourself last night, to which I was a witness—"

He could get no further, for the Squireen exploded again.

"Disgraceful exhibition! There it is. I dunno what she's talkin' about. I may have been a bit fresh—I'm not denyin' it. It was Christmas times, an' we were all there to be jolly together. I declare to you, Mac, I never had such an insult put upon me in my life. Disgraceful exhibition! Is it one of Doolan's penny peep shows she takes me for?"

"The lady evidently thinks you were intoxicated," observed the lawyer.

"Intoxicated!" roared O'Hara, springing to his feet. "I'd knock the teeth down the throat

of any man that would say the like. Begorra, if she thinks I was intoxicated that night, I'd like her to see me raal drunk. Sure, I hadn't even a headache in the mornin' an' ate well on to a pound of steak for me breakfast."

"Well, I only judge from her letter. If she doesn't mean that, I can't see what her meaning is."

"It was Judy Duggan done it; a well set-up colleen enough. I was wrastling her for a kiss in the cushion dance an' the two of us fell on the flure—leastways, that's what Tim Reilly tells me, for I disremember it myself."

"Oh, Mrs. Delaney is jealous then?" queried the lawyer, raising his eyebrows.

"It can't be anything else. Say I was drunk itself, what of it? It's a good man's case. Sure any gentleman's liable to take a glass too much—to say nothen of the festive occasion. But the widow's in bitter airnest. Read on; read it all."

"I am told you never ceased filling your glass the entire evening," resumed the lawyer, but O'Hara broke in again—

"I ax ye to notice that. What kind of hospitality do ye call that—counting a gentleman's glasses in her own house? Begorra, afther that I wouldn't marry her—not if she went down on her bended knees to me." He paused a moment, and then added loftily: "I was under the imprission that I was courtin' a lady."

Meanwhile McMaster, despairing of concluding if he continued to read aloud, had glanced over the letter, and looking up as he reached the end, said—

"Well, she makes her meaning plain enough, at any rate. She formally declares her engagement to you at an end, and desires that there may be no further communication between you."

"That's just it," replied Mat. "She acknowledges the engagement and breaks it off all in the one letter. That's why I brought it to you. Sure, what better could we want?"

"What better?" repeated the attorney, puzzled. "I fail to understand."

"Sure its a proof no jury could get over. Get ready yer action for breach of promise. Lay the damages high, for they niver give ye the half of what ye ask, an' put that letter in your safe. Its important."

The lawyer stared at him in amazement.

"Mr. O'Hara, you cannot be in earnest!"

"An' why not, I'd like to know?"

"To sue a lady for breach of promise. It is an unheard of thing."

"Begorra, it was heard of many a time," said the Squireen, truculently. "I heard of it to a purty tune when that wench of Thady Finnegan's got eighty pounds out o' me, an' its yersilf minds that case well, 'Torney McMaster, for by the same token ye nearly ruined me with the costs ye charged me. But its my turn now; get it back for me."

"That was a different thing altogether. But for a gentleman to sue a lady for breach——"

"Oh, begob, what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander," interrupted Mat.

"Take my advice; go home and think it over

quietly," urged the attorney. "Here's your letter."

"Put it in yer safe, I tell ye. Its important."

"Oh, well, if you wish," replied the other, placing the document aside; "but be careful what you do, or you'll make yourself the laughing stock of Ireland. You'll be having Gerald Delaney's cheque for nearly seventeen hundred one of these days, so you can consider that as damages and salve your wounded heart with it."

O'Hara left the office very ill-satisfied, and inveighing bitterly against the sex discrimination of British law as applied to cases of blighted affection.

"What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, I was always towld," he muttered.

As he rode down the village street he noticed that the wind had veered to the south.

"The frost's breaking up anyway," he thought, and made his way homeward somewhat comforted.

Just before he reached the turning that led to Ballintubber he encountered Mr. Gerald Delaney and Miss Kate Fetherstone riding very close together, while Nolan, the groom, maintained a respectful distance in the rear.

"Them two's coortin," he mused, as he saluted them. "How money marries money in this world! The like of it was never seen."

And, brooding on the many injustices of life, O'Hara rode home to Ballintubber.

CHAPTER XIX.

A Lost Opportunity.

Gerald, too, had been tempted by the southerly wind and the softening roads to give a little exercise to some of the horses who had been eating their heads off in the stables during the rigour of the long frost. Riding out alone, he had been lucky enough to meet Miss Fetherstone, not far from Liscarrick gate, and intent on a similar purpose.

He gladly accepted her invitation to turn his horse's head, and the two started together for a long country ramble, with Nolan as the sole representative of Mrs. Grundy.

It was their first meeting since the evening of the tenants' ball, and Kate was eager to learn if Mrs. Delaney had remained firm in her resolution and had definitely banished O'Hara. On this point Gerald's report was entirely favourable. His sister-in-law fully realised that she had narrowly escaped wrecking her life, and was determined to keep out of danger for the future. O'Hara had been rigorously denied the house, and Emmie had declared that she would rather leave the country than see him again.

"In fact," Gerald said, "she has surprised me by showing gleams of sense, and even reason since the other night. She said to Molly of her own accord that she would not be surprised if she, Molly, had been right all the time, and that

it was really O'Hara who interfered with her on the road that evening."

"And what said Molly?" asked Kate, much interested.

"Oh, she laughed, and said she wouldn't be surprised either, only how was his legend about the bullocks to be explained away."

"Well," prompted Kate.

"That puzzled Emmie. She went away reflecting, 'he certainly did have a black eye.'"

They both laughed heartily at this, for Kate had been made acquainted with all the details of the incident the day after it happened. Then the conversation turned to subjects of more personal interest.

"When will you give us another skating party on the Priory pond?" asked Gerald.

"The very next frost," she answered. "This one is about over. There's a bone in the ground still, but the surface is quite soft."

"Are you glad its gone?"

"I don't know. There's the hunting and all that to compensate one, but I loved the skating."

"So did I," said Gerald with rapturous remembrance, "especially that first day. Shall I ever forget that evening?"

"And that moon; wasn't it lovely?" She flushed a little at the recollection.

"It was the crown and climax of my home-coming," he cried. "Oh, Kate—may I call you Kate?"

"Why not?" she answered, demurely. "Your niece and nephew do."

"Thank you, and will you remember, in your turn, that I was christened Gerald?"

"That will be quite easy. We always speak of you as Uncle Gerald."

"Oh, not that," he protested. "Don't be cruel."

"Very well, but really 'uncle' is such a respectable title. The only uncle I ever had was Jack's father, and I never saw him that I know of."

"I'm not the least ambitious to be your uncle, Kate," he said; and forthwith tried to turn back the conversation into the track he was determined it should follow. For he had made up his mind to put his fate to the touch before he left Ireland, and when could he hope to find a more favourable opportunity?

"We were talking of your skating party," he said.

"Yes," she assented. "Aren't you sorry the weather prevents our having another. But one can't skate without ice, can one? To be sure there are rollers. They are very popular in America, I am told."

"Kate," he cried in desperation, "are you ever serious?"

"Very often," she answered. "How would you like a good brisk trot now? It will be some compensation for the lost ice party."

"I don't want a party," he said petulantly, "and I don't want ice."

"Not for skating?" she asked, assuming a very becoming air of surprise.

"It isn't the pond I recall with such pleasure,"

he continued, and there was more than a hint of passion in his voice, "it is the terrace. Don't you remember it all, Kate? The slow climb home; the gathering dusk, the faint touch of crimson in the sky past the house—the—the things we talked of. And then the night with its million stars, and the moon making lace out of the shadows of the beech twigs at our very feet. I felt so near you. My heart was very full that night."

He paused, but she made no sign. She was looking straight between her horse's ears, and but for the quickened heave of her bosom—and that may have been his fancy—he could not be sure she had heard him. But he was resolved that this day should end, for good or ill, the suspense in which this strange girl held him. He went on.

"Don't you understand me, Kate. Don't you see why that evening was the climax of my visit?"

She turned toward him at last. "I don't want to understand you. I like you—well, there, I like you very much indeed. Don't spoil it. Can't you leave us as we are?"

"That's impossible," he said, decidedly. "It must be all or nothing. Don't send me away. Don't let me leave home as I left it before—a failure."

He had drawn close to her—so close that his knee almost touched the flap of her saddle. In his earnestness he had laid his hand on her horse's neck, waiting, breathless for her reply.

She touched Red Rover with the whip and

drew away from his side so suddenly that he thought for a moment she had taken offence at his words. But as he raised his head he saw O'Hara riding towards them and saluting with his crop as he passed. Mechanically, Gerald returned the salute, and then, with a touch of the spur, shot forward and resumed his place at Kate's bridle.

"Confound that fellow," he muttered. "Is he to cross me at every turn?"

But try as he would, he could not win Kate back to a serious vein.

CHAPTER XX.

Gerald Delaney is Confronted with his Signature.

Molly's wedding day had been fixed for the first week in February—a day or two before Gerald's departure. He was to give the bride away—an office which Bob willingly surrendered. Jack had obtained an extension of his holiday sufficient for a brief honeymoon.

The bustle of preparation lent an unwonted animation to the old house; there were dressmakers down from Dublin, and Molly was in such constant demand for "fitting" that Jack Whalen complained he never got a chance to say more than "good morning" to her.

Kate gave the entire trousseau, and she gave with a liberal hand. Molly, who had never owned, or indeed seen such frocks before, was in a perpetual fever of excitement and delight. Gerald, as each fresh parcel arrived, would shake his head and pretend to commiserate with Jack.

"Ruin, black ruin, old chap," he would say. "How many years' salary do you calculate it will take to get this little lot through the New York customs?"

Mrs. Delaney continued very subdued throughout this busy time. She refused to go outside the place—indeed, she could scarcely be induced to leave the house, lest she should meet O'Hara. She often wept as she contemplated Molly's finery, but generally withdrew to

indulge her grief elsewhere, lest her tears might spot the delicate fabrics.

Bob, meanwhile, was more interested in the preparation of Liscarrick than he was in his sister's approaching wedding. Now that the weather had moderated he had the colt out daily, and was endeavouring to arrange for his reception at a famous training establishment in Kildare, but this was a matter which demanded ready money, and his pockets were empty. To hints and supplications alike his uncle turned a deaf ear, nor was he to be moved by all the specious arguments the young fellow could advance. Gerald was determined that the horse, so far as his value would go, should be used to redeem the note and for no other purpose.

This fast maturing note gave him an occasional qualm, especially when the vision of it came at night to his wakeful eyes, but Kate Fetherstone's image just now so filled his mind that he thought of little else, and, constitutionally careless as he was in money matters, let things drift.

It was with a shock of very unpleasant surprise that he received a formal notification from the National Bank at Drine calling his attention to his acceptance for sixteen hundred and forty-eight pounds, some odd shillings and pence, and requesting the deposit of funds to meet it.

This acted like a cold douche on his lovesick brain, and braced him to instant energy. He was quite conscious that he owed it to the consideration of the local bank manager, who was an old acquaintance, that this demand had not

taken the form of a notice of protest. He called to Bob to fetch round the pony trap and hold himself in readiness to drive into Drine, and then, with bank book and cheque book before him, went into an elaborate calculation of ways and means.

The result was discouraging. He had something over £500 to his credit. By the sacrifice of every penny he owned in the world, he could not come within a thousand pounds of redeeming his acceptance. And Bob, as he knew, had only a few shillings.

Just as they were starting Molly came running downstairs and begged for a seat. The great work of the trousseau was paralysed for lack of some trifling matter—thread or braid or buttons—and she hoped that Rogers' emporium at Drine might supply the deficiency.

Gerald alighted at the Bank, and directed Bob to join him at McMaster's office after he had dropped Molly at Rogers'. Bob felt very uncomfortable, and tried to wriggle out of the appointment. He knew his sins were on the point of finding him out, and he had no wish to be present at the discovery. But his uncle was peremptory, and he was forced to submit.

The interview with the manager was as unsatisfactory as it was brief. Mr. Allen was much surprised at Gerald's exposition of the real state of his finances. Like everyone else, the bank officials had accepted common report, and credited the Californian with wealth inexhaustible, and as Gerald had kept a fair balance and neither asked nor needed favours of any kind,

they had never had occasion to enquire into his position.

Mr. Allen shook his head gravely when he realised the situation.

"Mr. O'Hara is not altogether a pleasant person to deal with, and as for Mr. McMaster—well, of course, he will act on his client's instructions, whatever they may be. I am very sorry for you, Mr. Delaney; very sorry indeed. Perhaps the best thing is to do as you propose. Go and see McMaster and try to come to some arrangement. We don't close till three o'clock, you have some hours before you."

"And if no arrangement can be come to in that time," said Gerald, questioningly.

"The note will go to protest as a matter of course," replied the other.

"Thank you. I understand. Well, good morning," and he crossed the street towards the attorney's office, expecting to find his nephew awaiting him in the doorway.

But there was no sign of Bob.

"Hang it, he hasn't given me the slip I hope," thought Gerald, and he returned to the Bank on the chance that his nephew had misunderstood his instructions and was awaiting him there. As he crossed the street, a clatter of hoofs, as of a horse furiously driven and very close at hand, caused him to spring back on the pavement. A pony trap swept by at full speed, a girl driving. She was alone in the vehicle, and was plying the whip and urging on the pony as if she were bound on a life and death errand.

"Why, it's Molly," ejaculated her uncle in amazement. "What's come over the child? I suppose she's got her hooks and eyes and counts every minute lost till she has delivered them. I wonder how she expects we are to get home. Hoof it, I suppose," and he re-entered the bank.

Bob had not been there. Seriously annoyed, yet feeling he had no time to waste, Gerald again sought the attorney's office, and there, in the doorway, breathing hard as if from a sharp run, and looking thoroughly sheepish and uncomfortable, stood his truant nephew.

"Where have you been?" enquired Gerald crossly. "I've been looking for you everywhere." And without waiting for a reply he went on. "What's the matter with Molly? I saw her just now tearing down the street as if the devil was after her."

"Molly," said Bob stupidly. "Are you sure it was Molly?"

"Am I sure? She very nearly ran over me. She was going at the rate of a fire engine, and the trap swaying as if it would upset. We'll have to walk home I expect, but there's plenty to do first. A pretty mess you've landed us in with your race horses. Come in. We've got to have it out with McMaster."

And Bob, feeling smaller than he had ever felt in his life before, followed his uncle into the house. But before they reached the door of the attorney's sanctum, he plucked Gerald by the sleeve.

"Uncle," he faltered, "I—I—oh, wait a minute, I want to speak to you before we go in."

Gerald turned and faced round.

"Hurry up, then, old chap. I want to get this thing over."

But Bob was in no condition to hurry. He found it very hard to get out the necessary words at all, but in the end he managed to convey to his uncle some approximation to the truth. When he came to the share certificates, Gerald interrupted him.

"Let us have this clear. You stole them out of my portmanteau?"

Bob hung his head.

"You're a credit, I must say. And you pawned them off upon O'Hara as valuable securities."

"I'm awfully sorry. I never meant to. I was only going to bounce about them. It was to McMaster I showed them."

"And he's got them now?"

"Oh dear no," replied Bob glibly. "They're all safe in your room at home. Oh Uncle, I am sorry. I don't know what you must think of me."

"Well, I'll tell you. I think you're an unmitigated young blackguard and ungrateful to boot. I was ass enough to try to pull you out of a hole; you were mean enough to pull me in on the top of you, having first made the hole immeasurably deeper. How dare you tell these people that I am a man of means when you know I'm no such thing, and when I expressly forbade you to make any kind of false pretences about me. False pretences, indeed; I shouldn't wonder if McMaster could jail you for this. In with you and

have it out with him," and Gerald knocked at the door.

"Good morning, Mr. Delaney," said the attorney as they entered. "I was just drafting a letter to you on the subject of that note."

"That is what we have called about," replied Gerald.

"Exactly, I thought there must be some mistake," said McMaster in his most urbane tones. "Won't you be seated—and you, too, Mr. Robert. Quite so. I was astonished yesterday when Mr. Allen informed me that there were no funds to take up the acceptance. But I knew it must be an oversight."

"I am sorry to say I am not in a position to take it up," replied Gerald steadily, while Bob writhed in his chair. "You have been misinformed as to my means and position, and I am here to make the best offer in my power—to give you notes at such dates as we can agree upon for £1,200 and to pay you the balance in cash."

As Gerald spoke the attorney's mouth opened wider and wider, and his eyebrows went up till they almost touched his hair. For a moment he could not speak, but leaned forward, his hands on the arms of his chair, as if about to rise. Then he sank back in his seat.

"That is a curious statement, Mr. Gerald Delaney," he said at last. "If it is true, may I ask with what object you have systematically passed yourself off as a wealthy man ever since you returned to the neighbourhood."

"I have done nothing of the sort. I don't know what maggot people may have got in their

heads, but I never spread such a report, nor did I know it existed till some time after I had returned."

Gerald spoke calmly, but he had grown suddenly pale and there was an ominous tightening about the lips.

"At least you knew that such was the prevailing opinion at the time you accepted this note, and you were careful not to set it right," said the attorney.

"I cared, or was careful for nothing of the sort, and I would recommend you, Mr. McMaster, to be careful how you make insinuations which are very like insults. It was not my business to go about the place, disclosing my private affairs to all and sundry."

"You are attempting to take a tone with me which your position does not warrant," said McMaster severely. "I fancy most people will think that it was sharp practice, to use no harsher word, to trade on a false reputation in order to smuggle your name on to a valuable security, when all the time you were a man of straw. What about that Golden Horseshoe Mine? Your nephew told me in this very room that you had an interest in that running into the hundreds of thousands," and the attorney lay back in his chair with the air of a man who had crushed his opponent.

"My nephew was very wrong—quite mistaken in saying anything like that," Gerald answered, loyally endeavouring for the sake of the old name to screen Bob's trickery so far as possible. "It is true I hold something like a quarter interest in

an undeveloped mine. It may be worth much or little. At present, I don't suppose I could raise a five pound note on it."

"Then how came you——" began McMaster, but checked himself. "After all, there is nothing to be gained by discussing the matter here," he resumed. "You had better reserve your defence for the witness box."

"There is no occasion to bring it into court," Gerald quietly observed. "We do not dispute that the money is owing."

"There is such a thing as criminal proceedings," replied the attorney vindictively.

Bob bounded from his seat.

"It wasn't my uncle at all. He knew nothing about it. I found the——"

"Hold your tongue, Bob. Sit down and leave this to me." Then Gerald went on, turning to McMaster.

"Don't talk rubbish about criminal proceedings. You have suffered no wrong. The debt existed before I came on the scene at all. Be the value of my additional guarantee great or little, you are that much to the good."

"No, sir," retorted the lawyer. "But for your interference we should have attached and sold the horse."

"Attach him now, by all means," cried Gerald, "and sell him if you can find a purchaser. I ask nothing better."

"I am not sure that my client cares to be troubled with the animal," replied the attorney, feeling that he had rather overshot the mark. "You will understand that this repudiation of

yours has taken me by surprise. I will consult Mr. O'Hara and determine with him what course to take."

"I think, in your client's interests, it is the best thing you can do," Gerald said. "But you will oblige me by not using such a word as repudiation. I stand by my signature and repudiate nothing. I now formally renew my offer. Four hundred pounds cash, the balance in notes at six, twelve, and eighteen months, on which I am willing to pay six per cent. interest. You may call me a man of straw, Mr. McMaster, but I am also a man of my word; and I am not a pauper. Or in the alternative, seize the horse—I wish to heaven, you seized it long ago—and apply whatever he fetches to the debt. I advise you to lay this scheme before your client. It seems to me the only chance he has of getting his money. If £400 will not pay the deficit, I will give my note for the balance at my own date, bearing interest as I specified. And if I live, that note will be met at maturity."

"And if you do not live," suggested the lawyer.

"You can insure my life," said Gerald shortly. And, beckoning Bob to follow, he left the room.

CHAPTER XXI.

Kate's Eyes are Opened.

Bob had driven Molly to Rogers' as requested, but he purposely took her a long way round, for he wished to consult her, and, as a drowning man will clutch at a straw, he poured out the whole was in his sister's ear, though even to her he was not quite ingenuous. He strove to gloss over, and where that was impossible to excuse the discreditable part he himself had played, and dwelt much on the firm belief he had always entertained in his uncle's wealth.

But Molly knew her brother, and instantly arrived at an opinion of the whole transaction, which was very nearly correct. She saw at a glance how serious the situation might become—O'Hara rejected and incensed, Gerald ignorant of the shifts and pretences by which his nephew had secured his object. She hardly listened to Bob's excuses.

"Go straight to Uncle Gerald, tell him exactly what you have done. He must know the truth before he sees McMaster."

"But he will be awfully angry," objected Bob.

"I should think he ought to be. That doesn't matter, you have put him in a dreadful position. The least you can do is to see that he does not fight these people blindfold."

It was by no means characteristic of Molly that

she uttered scarce a word of reproach to her brother during his confession. It seemed to her a terrible thing—an inconceivable thing. It sickened and almost stunned her. But time was precious. Recrimination could come later. So she saw Bob started on his unwelcome errand, and then, turning her pony, lashed it into a gallop as she took the homeward road. She did not even see her uncle when he jumped back to escape the flying hoofs, though he filled all her thoughts.

"Poor uncle Gerald," she was saying to herself. "Nothing but worry and trouble ever since he came home, and now this—the worst of all!"

It was to Kate Fetherstone that Molly had been for years accustomed to turn in all her troubles, and almost instinctively she now sought the friend whom she had always found so helpful in her helplessness.

'My poor little girl," Kate said, sympathetically, when Molly had incoherently poured out her woes, "you musn't let all this distress you so; you did quite right to come to me. Bob, as I understand it, has been getting into difficulties and giving notes that he can't meet. Well, he's a very naughty boy, but I can't have you breaking your heart about him. His uncle, you say, will not help him."

"No, no, no!" cried the girl. "I must have been stupid and explained myself badly. Uncle Gerald has been awfully good, and signed this wretched note to gain time for him. Now, they are coming down on him for it, and expect him to pay it."

"A very natural expectation," laughed Kate. "People that sign notes must meet them. The best thing your uncle can do, after giving his foolish nephew a good scolding, is to pay and look pleasant."

"But he can't. He hasn't the money. All he has is a few hundred pounds, and they want ever so much more."

"Your uncle Gerald has only a few hundreds," Kate cried, in astonishment. "Why, I thought he was a millionaire, or something like it."

"So we all thought," answered Molly, "but he isn't. That mine of his—I was asking him about it only the other day. He says its nothing but a hole in the ground. He has nothing but his salary as newspaper correspondent."

Kate was silent. Her thoughts flew back to the many, many intimate conversations she had held with Gerald. Had he ever disclosed his real position to her? She was sure he had not. On the other hand, he had never posed as a wealthy man. She had accepted him as such; but, then, he had allowed her so to accept him. He had deceived her, none the less effectually because tacitly. And she had given him her heart; nay, more, she had quite made her mind up to give him her hand when he asked for it. The penniless adventurer wooing the heiress! That ride they had taken together! But for the accidental meeting with O'Hara she might be even now his affianced wife. The one great dread of her life, but for this opportune discovery, might have become a reality. She

had been wooed and well-nigh won for her money.

Molly watched the changing face with keen anxiety. She had no clue to the other's thoughts, but she plainly saw that something—something that had nothing to do with Bob or his embarrassments—had stricken Kate old and haggard in a moment. She slipped from her seat to her knees and caught her friend's hand.

"Kate, dear Kate, what have I said? What has hurt you so? Speak to me, dear. I can't bear to see you look like that. I wish I had never come to you with this trouble if it upsets you so."

Miss Fetherstone drew the girl towards her and kissed her, but it was a moment or two before she could trust her voice to reply.

"You were quite right to come to me, dear little friend," she said presently. "Come to me with all your troubles. I can never be too thankful you brought me this one."

Then she fell silent again. That night on the terrace, the passion that had vibrated in his tones! Could men be so base, could they stoop so low to gain wealth? And she, if she had yielded, what a fate had been hers. Bought and sold, for the value that was in her, like a sheep at a fair.

Molly waited for her to continue, but for whole minutes only the ticking of the clock on the mantel broke the silence. At last she ventured a timid questioning, "yes"?

Kate roused herself with a start. "I beg your pardon, dear. What were we talking

about? Oh, to be sure. This trouble your people have got into. I meant, when you told me first, to have tried to arrange the matter for Bob——"

"Oh, thank you, dear!" broke in Molly gratefully.

The other continued, speaking in a cold, level voice—

"But as you explain it, it seems rather your uncle's affair. I am afraid I could not presume to interfere."

Molly was clever enough, and she was quite familiar with the views Miss Fetherstone held on courtship and marriage, nor had Gerald's attitude towards Kate, on the many occasions she had seen them together, escaped the girl's keen eyes. She had watched the growth of that romance with an assured hope that it would have a happy ending. So the tone in which Miss Fetherstone had announced that she could not presume to interfere in her uncle's affairs, spoke volumes to Molly's ear. It told her that the sudden announcement of Gerald's true position had re-awakened in Kate the haunting fear that she was being sought, not for herself but for what she had.

"Oh, but Kate, dear," she cried, "you mustn't misunderstand Uncle Gerald. He never pretended to be anything but what he really is. It was all our own silly faults. We would have it that he was so rich—I don't know why, except that he was always so generous, and used to give us presents that you would only expect a very rich man to make. And you know the wild

ideas people here have about anyone that comes from America. But this, I am sure—never by word or act did Uncle Gerald try to deceive anyone, and I'm sure he'd rather die than deceive you."

But Kate's mind was in its most morbid state, and she only saw in this impassioned appeal a confirmation of her betrayal. The whole Delaney family, then, were in league to capture the heiress. Well, from their point of view it was natural enough. For herself it was only one more disillusionment, but far the worst.

"I am sure I am far from criticising any course Mr. Gerald Delaney has chosen to adopt. I am surprised to hear he is not a wealthy man; I had somehow always fancied he was, and I am sorry for his and all your sakes it is not so. But of course it is no business of mine."

The girl regarded her wistfully. This tone was new to her. She longed to speak—she had so much to say in praise of her adored uncle—but she feared to make matters worse, and remained silent.

"And, now, Molly," Kate continued, "I'm afraid I must send you away. I'd ask you to stay and have some lunch, but I have a headache, and fear you'd find me poor company. I think I had better lie down."

"Poor you," the girl said, wistfully. She had much ado to choke back her tears.

Kate held out her hand. Molly noticed she did not offer to kiss her.

"Good-bye. I hope this little difficulty will arrange itself satisfactorily."

"I hope so; I'm only sorry I troubled you about it," Molly replied.

And for the first time in her life she left the Priory far more sadly than she had entered it.

When she had gone Kate threw herself on the sofa.

"Oh, the shame of it! The bitter, burning shame of it! Is it always to be so with me. And I could have loved him! God help me, I do love him!"

CHAPTER XXII.

MISUNDERSTANDING.

GERALD had done all in his power, and could now only await the event. Whether O'Hara would be inclined or not to accept such composition as he was able to offer, he had no means of knowing. His best hope was that the creditor might seize the horse; his worst fear, that Bob would be thrown into bankruptcy and Liscarrick sold. And all the while his sensitive pride tingled at the thought of lying under the sufferance of such a man as O'Hara. Had it been in his power he would have gladly paid up, though it had beggared him.

Molly had told him something of her last interview with Kate Fetherstone, and the deduction she had drawn therefrom. This gave Gerald more concern than all the rest. The very next morning saw him on his way to the Priory, resolved, as he said, to have it out with Kate. As he went he pondered, reviewing, even as she had done, the course of their friendship, and trying to remember how much or how little had been said, how much or how little had been withheld.

Of any intentional deception his conscience acquitted him. Since Kate Fetherstone had crossed his horizon he had come to regard her as the one woman in the world for him—the one he coveted; the one he would do his best to win.

Creature of moods and impulses as she was, he had found her infinitely charming, and the question of money had never entered his thoughts in connection with her, save when she introduced it herself in the course of some of her morbid imaginings.

By habit and training Gerald was more than half an American, and he looked at these things as an American might be expected to look. If he brought to the common stock his love and all else that he had, be that much or little, he considered that he was contributing as liberally as his chosen bride, who could bring no more though she were richer than King Midas.

He knew, however, that Kate would look at the position differently, viewing it through the distorting medium of her own prejudices. 'Prejudices,' he called them, and yet he could not but make allowance for Kate's feelings—a woman who had been wooed so often, but never, as she believed, loved for herself.

By the time he rode up to the Priory door he had all his facts prepared, all his arguments marshalled. Hopefully he rang, and was told that Miss Fetherstone was ill, and could not see anyone.

Meanwhile O'Hara and McMaster were not letting the grass grow under their feet. The attorney duly submitted Gerald's proposition, which Mat, after considering it in all its bearings, was prepared to accept.

"For look at here, Mac," he argued. "If I go for to sell up the ould place, by yer own showing it'll take the divil of a lot of time, an'

I'm not denyin' that a bit o' ready would be convaynient just now—will ye tell me the time it wouldn't be? An' I believe in the thoroughbred if ever he got fair play. I'll go for the little harse, Mac, an' what money I can get to the boot of him."

"You'd get every penny due you if you sold up Robert Delaney," said the attorney, "but its for you to decide."

"Well, now, here's the truth for ye," said O'Hara. "Ye may call me sintimintal an' a d——d fool, but I couldn't be afther sellin' a house where I've drunk as much good whiskey as I have in Liscarrick, an' Gerald was very dacent to me in the latther end—coverin' me with a rug that night, an' pillows to me head. By-the-bye, have ye sarved the widow with papers, or whatever it is you have to do afore ye breach her."

"If you please, we will keep to the matter in hand," said the lawyer, repressing a smile. "One thing at a time. You've decided, then, to accept Mr. Gerald Delaney's offer, four hundred pounds in cash, and his notes for such further deficit as the sale of this animal leaves uncovered."

"What sale? I'm to have the little harse, ain't I?"

"The procedure is this. We distrain on the debtor's goods—in this case the horse is practically the only available asset. Then the goods—the horse, you know, are sold by auction. If they fetch more than the debt, the excess is returned to the debtor. If they fetch less, why

Mr. Gerald stands ready to make up the difference in cash and notes."

"But I didn't want to sell the little harse. I want to own an' run him," objected O'Hara.

"Well, buy him in," said McMaster. "You can bid at the auction as well as another."

"Maybe he'll go higher than I care to go," Mat remarked.

"Not he," replied the attorney. "It's my belief fifty pounds will buy him. Remember, there's no reserve in a sale like this, and who's likely to bid for a thoroughbred in these parts. In the first place no one has the money, and in the next no one would know what to do with such an animal if he had it."

"Begorrah, Mac, ye've a great head on you entirely," exclaimed the Squireen, smacking his knee enthusiastically. "If I get that little harse for fifty—aye, or two hundred and fifty, I'll have the inside of the deal—an' Gerald's four hundred to pay it with. When will ye sell him?"

"We have to seize him first," began McMaster, but O'Hara interrupted.

"Don't seize him for yer life. He has no vice, but he's plenty of spirit. Take him gently, an' he'll lead like a sheep."

"Oh, well," said the attorney, impatiently, "we must first take possession of the animal—there will be no difficulty about that under the arrangement Mr. Gerald proposes—then the sale must be advertised——"

"That settles it," broke in Mat. "The minute Flannagan hears of it he'll be down, an' he'd go over a thousand, hopping."

"We need only advertise in the local paper, and a bill or two at the chapel door and on a few gate-posts. Make your mind easy. It will be quite a local affair."

"Begob, Mac, if you bring this off for me, I'll say ye're the greatest lawyer ever was pupped by the divil, an' that's sayin' a big word."

And nodding to his friend, O'Hara lounged out of the office.

For a few days McMaster was busy with the preparation for his projected coup. Judgment had to be secured on the protested note and distress issued in default of payment. The necessary legal papers were served on Bob, but this gave his uncle little concern. The affair was taking the course he had hoped. The horse would be seized; well and good. He could not fail to fetch £1,000, even on forced sale. Say he only brought half his original price—that would be £800, Gerald stood ready with £400 more, and the balance could await his convenience. He began to see his way out of the tangle.

But if the sky showed signs of clearing in one direction, in another the clouds lowered dark and ominous. Every day for a week Gerald rode over to the Priory and inquired for Miss Fetherstone, and each day he was met with the same answer, delivered in unchanging tones by Bishop.

"Miss Fetherstone is not well, sir, and is not seeing anyone."

One day he encountered Mrs. Purvis, but his

anxious inquiries elicited little from that estimable lady.

"Dear Kate has not been quite herself for a few days—nothing serious—oh, dear no; she seems to have lost her appetite, and is not sleeping well. No, she will not see a doctor. Its really nothing to be alarmed about. Its the change in the weather, I expect. Some people find these thaws very trying. Yes, I'll tell her you were inquiring. Good morning."

On Sunday Gerald went to Molly.

"Look here, dear. I'm afraid Kate Fetherstone is very ill. Oughtn't you to go and see her? I'll drive you over if you like."

"I don't think she is very ill, Uncle, and I am sure she wouldn't care to see me. I don't think I'd better go."

"It looks so unkind, dear,"

"Well, if you think so, but I'm sure its no use."

After church, Molly went to the Priory, unwillingly enough, but she would have undertaken more distasteful tasks to please her uncle. The result was as she had expected.

"Miss Fetherstone's love, miss, and its very good of you to call, but she really thinks she had better keep perfectly quiet for a few days."

So Molly returned with all the sensations of having received a snub, and Gerald was at his wit's end.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Plain Speaking.

Molly's visit of enquiry, though seemingly unavailing, was not without result. For a whole week Kate had borne her torture in solitude, now framing denunciations of Gerald's perfidy wherewith to overwhelm him when they met, now conning over every word he had spoken to her, and analysing the very tone of each utterance, hoping to acquit him of deliberate deceit. But through it all she longed to see him, and day after day she resolutely denied herself to his enquiries, suffering perhaps, more than he did.

No sooner had Molly gone than she would have recalled her message if she could, and resolved to see her on the next occasion. Molly did not come again, but Gerald called as usual the next day and Kate received him.

He thought her looking pale, though that was usual to her, and she did not rise to greet him. But she showed, to his eye, few traces of recent illness.

"I hope you are better," he said, coming eagerly forward.

"Much better thank you; quite well in fact," she replied. "You have been very kind and attentive in calling to enquire. May I ask why?"

The coldness of her tone chilled Gerald. Molly

had been right then. But he answered her as if they both stood quite on the old footing.

"Why? because I was anxious. Surely you must have realised by this time that your health and happiness mean a great deal to me."

"So I had begun to believe," she replied. "But quite lately I have come to doubt if my health and happiness are the possessions of mine which interest you most."

There was no mistaking her meaning. Gerald flushed hotly as he rose from his chair, but she continued in the same cool, cutting tones.

"Mr. Delaney, you have passed as a very rich man. Is that your real position?"

"Far from it," he answered.

"Then why, sir——" Kate's temper was beginning to rise and her voice shook—"then why have you always led me to believe that you were?"

"I never told you anything of the sort."

His temper too, was going, but his self control was far greater than hers.

"Granted," she retorted, "but you never denied the fact."

"Why should I?" he asked coolly.

Then Kate blazed out.

"What right had you to come to me in such a guise? What business had you to speak words of love to me if you did not care for me."

"Did any words I have spoken to you cause you to believe I cared for you?"

"They did," she answered quickly. "And they were intended to."

"They were," he assented. "And what busi-

ness have you to doubt that I meant every word I uttered?"

"Doubt!" she said scornfully, "when we know, we doubt no longer. We are no strangers. You have heard my opinions and my experiences. We have discussed them many a time. And yet you left me in the dark."

"Miss Fetherstone," Gerald said quietly, "a man does not seek the woman he loves with a schedule in his hand of his assets and liabilities. He tries to win her heart first of all, convinced that if he can do that all the rest will follow. At least, so it seems to me. You think differently. In you I see a noble woman whose nature has been warped by the consciousness of undue riches, but you were the one woman in the world for me, and I thought, if I could succeed in kindling the spark of real love within you, I could lay this demon of distrust that you have conjured up, and make you forget your money."

"Can you truthfully say that you forgot it—that all this time you have never thought of my money?" she demanded.

"I have thought of it often and often," he replied, "and always to curse it as the one barrier circumstances had set between us."

Kate hesitated a moment, and for a moment Gerald hoped he had convinced her. But her temper ruled her still.

"You are very eloquent," she sneered. "The most eloquent of all who have told me the same tale and sworn, as you do, that I was everything and my wealth was nothing. But I found

them out in time, as I have found you out to-day."

"Then there is no more to be said," replied Gerald. "I pity you profoundly, Kate. You will never find happiness. Your money is a curse to you."

She stared wildly at him, struggling to speak, but the words would not come. At last her overstrained nerves found relief in a wild, hysterical burst of weeping. She threw herself on the couch and buried her face in the pillows.

"A curse to me," she sobbed. "Oh, it is that; God knows it is that."

But Gerald had left the room.

After a time the sobs died down and she grew calmer. Temper had been effectually quenched in that flow of tears. She rose and looked in a mirror.

"What a fright I am," she exclaimed aloud, "and oh, but I am so miserable. If I should be wronging him."

Her eyes filled again at the possibility, and she turned impatiently away.

"If this goes on I shall be making myself ill," she thought, "and he is not worth it. None of them are."

She went upstairs and locked herself in her room, refusing to appear at luncheon. She denied admittance to Mrs. Purvis, telling that lady through the door that she needed nothing, and wished to be left alone. Then she threw herself on the bed and lay for more than an hour —thinking, thinking.

This grew unbearable, and the solitude almost

equally so. She rose and went to her writing desk.

"Dearest Molly," she wrote, "will you spare one of your happy hours to poor, miserable me, and come over and have a cup of tea with me in my bedroom. I am afraid I was cross to you last time you were here, but I was very upset and out of sorts at the time. I know—at least I hope—that you will forgive me."

And she signed herself, "Yours as always, Kate."

"Tell Nolan to take this note over to Liscarrick and wait for an answer," she said to the maid who appeared in response to her ring. "No, just tell Nolan I want to see him."

When the girl had gone she tore open the envelope and added a few lines.

"Do come, dear, and come at once. I am sending the brougham. I would love you to stay all night, but I know, under the circumstances, that is asking too much, so I will send you back whenever you like."

"Nolan," she said, opening the door when the groom knocked, "take the brougham and drive over with this note for Miss Delaney. Wait for an answer. Very likely she will come back with you."

As the man knuckled his forehead and turned to go she noticed a newspaper in his hand.

"What's that?" she asked. "'The Drine Sentinel'? Do you read that rag?"

"There's an advertisement in it, miss, one of the boys was showing me. Maybe you haven't seen it."

And he handed her the paper, indicating with his finger the paragraph referred to. She took it, and read:

IMPORTANT SALE.

On Tuesday, the 26th January, at 12 noon, Messrs. Cleary and O'Shaughnessy will sell by auction, at Mr. Farrell's yard, the celebrated thoroughbred horse Liscarrick, by Firefly out of Magda, formerly owned by Robert Delaney, Esq., of Liscarrick. Absolutely no reserve. The sale for the benefit of the creditors.

It was Torney McMaster's advertisement, and his spite had not omitted to deliver the sting that lay in the concluding paragraph.

"Tuesday, the 26th," Kate said, glancing again at the paper. "Why that's to-morrow."

"It is, miss."

"I did not know they were selling the horse. You might leave me this, Nolan."

"Certainly, miss," and the groom withdrew.

"The sale for the benefit of the creditors," read Kate. "This is that wretched note. Poor Gerald. The blow really falls on him. He tried to save his nephew and could not."

And she re-entered her room with the paper clutched in her hand.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Dove with the Olive Branch.

"This is very sweet and kind of you, Molly," said Kate, as the girl entered the room. "It always does me good to see you, but you never were more welcome."

"Of course, I'm glad to come to you, Kate dear, and I'd like to do you good. I'm awfully sorry to hear you've been so seedy. You don't look up to much, that's a fact." And Molly regarded her attentively.

Kate returned the scrutiny, and fancied she detected the traces of recent tears in her visitor's pretty eyes.

"I sent for you to cheer me up, dear, but from the looks of you, you need cheering yourself. Why, what's all this about?" she added, as Molly turned away to hide her face. "You ought to be as happy as the day is long, and you've been crying—you're crying this minute."

"Oh, Kate," the girl wailed, no longer trying to keep the tears back, "Uncle Gerald's going away. He's going away before my wedding."

Kate was thunderstruck. She had never contemplated this. What she wished for or hoped for regarding Gerald she could not have told herself, but the blank negation of absence, the emptiness of the world which she felt without him, and which if he left now, she realised would never be filled again, appalled her. There

was a catch in her breath which she could not master as she exclaimed—

"Going away! Not for good and all. Not back to California!"

"Yes," sobbed Molly. He came home just before lunch, and told me he could not possibly wait. He was unexpectedly called back, he said, and must leave at once."

"At once? That does not mean to-day, does it?" Kate was white to the lips.

"Oh, no. He will wait for the auction to-morrow—they have seized Liscarrick for Bob's debts, you know, and are selling him. And there is some other business he has to settle. But he leaves on Thursday and will sail Saturday."

Thursday! And this is Monday." There was time still, Kate thought, if she could but bend her stubborn pride to own she had wronged him.

Aye, but had she wronged him? The struggle began anew between her heart and the habit of distrust that years had engendered. She hardly listened as Molly poured out her grief and disappointment, yet when she paused Kate realised that she had understood all the girl had been saying.

"I had so set my heart on Uncle Gerald giving me away. It meant so much to me. Bob won't be the same thing. Do you know that, next to Jack, he and you are the dearest of all to me in the whole world."

"He and you," the conjunction sounded pleasant in Kate's ears. Molly went on—

"I don't know what you have done to him—or rather, I do. It all dates from that day. Oh, Kate, this is no time for politeness and concealment of anything but the plain truth. I know what you have been thinking ever since I told you Uncle Gerald was a poor man; but you wrong him. Kate, indeed, you wrong him. Uncle Gerald never thought of money. He never cared for it in his whole life. He might have been rich if he was like other men and cared, but he never did. I have watched him, and I am sure he loves you with his whole heart, and it's proud and happy you ought to be to think you have won the love of a man like Uncle Gerald—and, oh, Kate, you won't let him go away."

Molly poured out her appeal in a torrent of breathless words, and Kate, looking down into the honest depths of the swimming eyes, marvelled that she could have ever doubted the girl's transparent sincerity,—yet she had doubted, and suspicions, unwarranted in one case, might well be unwarranted in all. Was she wronging Gerald?

"I'm afraid it doesn't rest with me to keep or send him," she said. "He was here to-day, and I spoke very cruelly, very bitterly—words that no man could forget, and God forgive me, since I have seen you I feel that perhaps I misjudged him."

"Will you tell him so? I don't care what you said. Uncle Gerald loves you so that if you but stretched out your hand he would come from the end of the world to take it."

"Heaven reward you, Molly, and it will," cried Kate. "Blessed are the peace makers."

Molly sought her uncle the moment she arrived at Liscarrick, but he had driven out with Bob soon after lunch, and they had not yet returned. So she unburdened herself to Jack, from whom she had no secrets.

That young gentleman was not hopeful. He already knew something of his cousin's idiosyncracy, and suspected it was deep-seated.

"Well, if that is all Kate's money has done for her," he remarked, "I'm glad Grandpa didn't leave it to me."

To which his bride-elect replied—

"It isn't all it's done. Look at the lovely trousseau it has bought for me."

"That's so," answered Jack, "but it has come jolly near spoiling Kate's own trousseau for her, and I only hope it won't spoil it yet."

Bob returned in the pony trap soon after dark, but he was alone. To Molly's eager enquiries, he replied that he had driven his uncle in to catch the 2.50 train for Dublin, and that he had seen him off in it.

Molly's countenance fell.

"He's—he's not gone away like this without saying good-bye or anything?"

"Not he," replied Bob. "He had a wire, and said he must run up to town. But he'll be back for the auction to-morrow. He promised he would. Besides, all his traps are here."

So Molly did not see her uncle that night.

CHAPTER XXV.

SELLING A THOROUGHBRED.

THE auction sale the next day was a very tame affair. The hour fixed was twelve, and Jack Whalen and Bob were present to see the last of Liscarrick. Gerald's train was late, and he only arrived in the yard a few minutes before the horse was led out. The first thing that struck him was the sparse attendance.

"Why there's scarcely anyone here," he remarked after he had greeted the others. "Bar the casual loafers who are always with us, the place is nearly empty. I expected to see dealers from Cork and Dublin and all over."

"Maybe they hadn't heard of it," suggested Jack.

"How can that be? It's been advertised, I suppose?" said Bob.

"If it has, it doesn't seem to have done much good, judging by the attendance," Gerald observed, glancing round the score or so of farmers who constituted the assemblage, and who did not look, as Bob observed, "as if they could raise a fiver amongst them."

"Then it seems as if Bob's horse isn't quite so good as he thought it was," remarked Jack.

"There isn't a better horse in Ireland, unless they've bedevilled him since they took him from me," retorted Bob, hotly. "Here he comes. Look at him yourself."

Certainly it was a very handsome colt that was led up and down the yard by one of Farrell's stable men. He moved well and there was fire in his eye—with an occasional backward glance, showing the white, which did not augur well for his temper.

"Vicious, eh?" asked Jack.

"Not he. Only upset by the strangeness of it all," replied Bob, vindicating his favourite's character to the last.

"There's O'Hara," cried Gerald suddenly. "There near the door; standing with McMaster. Don't pretend to see them."

"The d—d curs," muttered Bob. "What have they come here for? To gloat, I suppose."

"Gentlemen," began the auctioneer, "I have to offer you an unique and splendid opportunity—such an opportunity as has not been heard of in this district, I'll be bound to say, since it was a—ahem!—district. You see the three year old colt, Liscarrick, late property of a well known sportsman—" Bob felt a thrill of pleasurable pride and raised his head, which had of late been carried very low——"The horse is in the stud book—by Fire Fly out of Magda, an Oaks winner, to be sold with all his engagements, absolutely without reserve. Come, gentlemen, what am I bid?"

No one spoke. One old farmer went over to feel Liscarrick's legs and was received with a kick which, had it got home, would have quenched his interest in horse flesh for many a day. He retired.

"Come, gentlemen," the auctioneer recom-

menced impatiently. "Start the bidding. Run him down the yard, Tom. Let the gentlemen see how he moves. Ah, there's action. Look at him well; he can stand it. Come, come gentlemen, say something, please. The horse must be sold."

"Ten pounds," said the farmer whose brains Liscarrick had tried to explore. This offer was received by the bystanders with a shout of derisive laughter.

"Thank you, sir!" The auctioneer acknowledged the bid with excessive politeness. "Any advance on ten pounds?" he went on ironically.

"Twenty," said another voice.

"Thirty," cried O'Hara.

Bob, when the bidding started at this absurd figure, looked from one to the other of his friends in consternation.

"What does it mean?" he gasped.

"A mock auction, I'm afraid," said Jack. "Gerald, old chap, I'm sorry for you. I'm afraid you've been had."

"There's O'Hara," cried Gerald, recognising the voice that made the last bid. "He's here to buy the colt in. It's a knock out, I'm afraid."

"I can't go far, but he shan't have it for nothing," cried Jack. "Forty."

"Fifty," from O'Hara.

"Sixty!" said Jack.

"Thank you, gentlemen," chirped the auctioneer. "Only sixty offered for the son of Fire Fly and Magda. Why he's worth thousands."

O'Hara had by this time recognised his opponent. He squared himself and opened his chest.

"One hundred!" he shouted.

"That lets me out, I'm afraid," whispered Jack, and dropped into the background.

"One hundred pounds," repeated the auctioneer, "only one hundred pounds. Why, gentlemen, this is a disgrace to the county. No advance on one hundred pounds. Going, going——"

"Seventeen hundred pounds," cried a voice from the back of the yard, just in time to arrest the fall of the poised hammer.

There was a moment's silence, and then a ringing cheer went up from the men in the yard. It was an Irish crowd, and dirty, barefoot, unkempt as most of them were, they were sportsmen to a man. This sensational rise in the bidding appealed to them.

In the breathless hush that followed the unexpected offer, a boy's treble piped up from somewhere:

"Begorrah, I didn't know there was that much money in the world."

The auctioneer waited till the rustle of excitement had subsided.

"That's something like," he said. "Seventeen hundred bid—seventeen hundred offered. Come, Mr. O'Hara!"

He looked over at the Squireen, but the latter shook his head.

"I dunno what looney's offering that money, but I know when I'm bet. I'd like to see him

puttin' up the notes, though, afore I give in."

"Seventeen hundred—any advance? Going—going—gone!" and the hammer fell.

"Step up, sir, if you please, and sign your name," continued the auctioneer, almost in the same breath.

Everyone was eager to see the adventurous bidder, and there was much pushing and craning of necks as Nolan forced his way to the front.

"Why, it's Miss Fetherstone's groom," cried the auctioneer. "Are you bidding for your mistress, my man?"

"I am that," replied Nolan. "D'ye think is she good for the money?"

Gerald's first sensation had been one of exquisite relief as he realised that the sale, begun in such discouraging fashion, had after all brought in the full sum for which he had bound himself. But the extraordinary course which the bidding had followed puzzled him, and even while Bob was rubbing his hands in ecstasy, a suspicion of the truth came to his uncle—a suspicion converted into a certainty as Nolan stepped forward to the desk.

He recalled the terms on which Kate and he parted; indeed, he needed not to recall them—they were an ever present torture to him. How could he lie under an obligation to this proud, disdainful woman, who believed the worst of him and did not scruple to tell him so?

But he was powerless. Miss Fetherstone was free to bid for a horse put up at public auction, and the price she paid for it was purely her own affair. He had not intended to see her

again before his departure, but after what had happened to-day, he felt he could not leave without some word of acknowledgement or remonstrance, or both. Most likely she would not receive him. Still, he owed it to himself to make the attempt.

He accosted the groom as he turned from the desk after paying the usual deposit.

"That was a big jump you gave the bidding, Nolan," he said. "Less than that would have sickened Mr. O'Hara, I fancy."

"So do I, sir, but I followed me orders," Nolan replied.

"Were your orders to offer seventeen hundred right off, irrespective of what bids preceded yours?"

"They were, sir. Miss Fetherstone towld me never to mind what was said, but to bid £1,700 for the horse, and to be sure he didn't go for a penny less. Beg pardon, sir, but Miss Fetherstone said not to lose a minute comin' back an' tellin' her how things went."

And Nolan touched his hat and moved away to take possession of his purchase.

Meanwhile, O'Hara had been exchanging a few rapid words with McMaster.

"She's done me in the eye," the Squireen said. "They've got the best of me."

"You'll get every penny of your money, though," observed the attorney consolingly.

"I will; that's something; but I wanted to get even wid them stuck up Delaneys. And I'll do it yet," Mat added with an oath. "Get ready them papers an' slap at the widow with

a breach of promise action. That'll put another complexion on it, as the man said when he peeled the potato."

"But O'Hara," urged McMaster, "it will do you no good. You won't receive a penny. You'll only——"

The other cut him short.

"No words. Do as I bid you. If they're lookin' for someone to wipe their feet on, it's not on this Mat they'll do it," and he strode over to the group which had gathered round the thoroughbred.

Nolan had just taken the halter in his hand and was in the act of leading the horse from the yard.

"Tell Miss Fetherstone, with my compliments," the Squireen said, "that she can have what she's bought for all of me. I can't buck up against Whalen's Distillery. And tell her I know something about this little harse, and I wouldn't advise her to ride him on the snaffle. Away with ye now," and raising his hand he bestowed a hearty smack with his open palm on Liscarrick's quarter.

The horse lashed out instantly. One of the iron shod heels caught O'Hara on the shoulder and the other on the temple. He fell where he stood as if he had been poleaxed.

When they raised him up he was dead.

CHAPTER XXVI.

And so They were Married.

Gerald paced up and down the Priory drawing-room, a prey to a dozen varying emotions, which swept over his mind without sequence or connection, and wholly independent of his volition. Miss Fetherstone had sent word she would be down directly, but the minutes passed and she did not appear.

What would she say to him, and what should he say to her? He felt that he could not endure to hear again such cutting words as she had given him yesterday in this very room. Yet then he had faced her on equal terms. To-day, he lay under the weight of an obligation, for he could not blink the fact that Liscarrick had been bought for his sake, or, if not for his, for the sake of his family name and honour.

Meanwhile, Kate's thoughts were as tumultuous as Gerald's own. O'Hara's fate came as a great shock to her. She felt, illogically she told herself, but still irresistibly, that if she had not intervened at the auction, the man would be alive at this moment. If she had not bid for the horse—and here her reflections changed! She could not have seen Gerald sacrificed—the victim of a dirty plot in a dirty town. Nolan had told her that the auction was a mere farce; a plan

devised to get possession of the horse and still keep her friends in the power of their creditors. Well, it was done, and she had acted for the best according to her lights.

She paused a moment in front of a mirror to assure herself that her hair was not disarranged; then she entered the drawing-room.

They both felt the awkwardness of the moment. Kate was the first to speak.

"What a terrible business about poor Mr. O'Hara," she said.

"Yes, terrible, wasn't it?" he replied. "I suppose you heard how it happened."

"Yes, Nolan told me. Do you know the last words the poor fellow uttered before he was struck down were a kind of message to me?"

"He felt sore over your outbidding him for Liscarrick," said Gerald. "I, on the contrary, have every reason to be grateful. Why did you buy him—and at such a price?"

"Oh, that horse," she exclaimed. "I shall never be able to look at him. He is a murderer."

"Why did you buy him?" persisted Gerald.

"Because," began she, and stopped. "Hasn't Molly told you anything?"

"I have not seen Molly since lunch time yesterday. I had to run up to town in the afternoon and she was out when I started."

"Oh!" said Kate. She had trusted that Molly's explanation would have made her task of retraction easier—that Gerald would have met her half way. Now she found that all

remained for herself to do, and his manner seemed cold and forbidding.

"Did Molly know you were going to bid for the horse?" he asked.

"No. I said nothing at all to her about it. I wish I had never thought of it. If I had not interfered that wretched man would have been alive now. You were quite right when you said my money was a curse. It brings ill-luck and misery wherever it goes; but this is the first time it has brought death."

"Oh, Miss Fetherstone, what a dreadful view to take," said Gerald, speaking as lightly as he could. "O'Hara brought his fate on himself. He struck the horse when he was standing straight in the line of the heels, and he knew the brute kicked. And if you could have seen Bob's face when he heard Nolan's bid, you would not say that your money had brought misery—to him, at any rate!"

"And you?" Kate asked swiftly. "I confess I was not much thinking of Bob in the affair. Did I bring relief or misery to you?"

Gerald looked at her in surprise. Her tone was different. Her manner was different. What could have happened to work such a change in twenty-four hours? He still kept guard on himself.

"My feelings were very mixed," he answered. Of course, I was glad to see that wretched note cleared off. It had been harassing me so long. By the way, how came you to know anything about it, and above all the exact amount, almost

to a fraction, that was needed to pay debt and costs?"

She was embarrassed and remained silent a moment, fingering the long chain she wore at her neck.

"Oh, one has nothing to do but gossip about one's neighbours in a silly little place like this," she said at last. "One hears everything."

"Molly told you?" he suggested.

She nodded.

Gerald drew a long breath.

"Well, I suppose I should be very grateful to you, and I am. But it isn't pleasant to be under so large a pecuniary obligation, especially to a lady. If I had the money I would ask you to sell me the horse at the price you gave for him. Unfortunately I have not, and while I can never cancel the debt of gratitude I owe your kindness, I must ask you to accept some arrangement that will make it less onerous for me."

"What do you mean?" she asked. The tone he was taking made the admission she contemplated very hard.

"I am returning to San Francisco almost immediately," he explained. "I am going back to work. I earn a good salary and I can live very cheaply. Will you do what McMaster, on poor O'Hara's behalf, had agreed to. That is, to let me pay you back by instalments. I could do it in eighteen months or two years—with suitable interest, of course. I think I will find you the more lenient creditor," he finished with rather a pitiful smile.

"So you refuse to let me help you, even in this trifle," said Kate sadly.

"You must see for yourself that I cannot."

"And we used to be such friends!" She paused and resumed abruptly:

"Tell me, if I had not said—you know—what I said to you yesterday would you be satisfied to let me keep the horse and say no more about it?"

"Ah, but the words have been said," replied he. "You must realize things are on a different footing to-day."

"Are words irrevocable, then?" she cried passionately.—"Must we weigh each sentence we utter lest it come back to crush us? Do you remember a talk we had—it was the day I lost my temper with Nolan and dismissed him. I said: 'I am always saying something I want to take back afterwards,' and you said 'It is a woman's privilege.' You spoke quite lightly and pleasantly, for it was not your affair; it did not touch you. But now that the case comes home to yourself, there is no smile or prettily turned compliment; no allowance for a woman's hasty temper; 'The words have been said'—I quote yourself, and they must stand irrevocable though my heart is breaking."

A flood of tears choked her utterance. She hid her face on the arm of the sofa, and shook in a very paroxysm of unrestrained grief.

Gerald was on his feet in a moment. He approached her; then he paused, wondering. He dropped on his knees beside her and strove to take her hand, but she

shook it free and covered her face again.

"Go away, go away," she sobbed. "Don't mind me; I don't know what I am saying, and I had better take care," she added with an hysterical laugh, "for words are irrevocable."

"They are not," whispered he: "Everything may be changed if the heart remains changeless. Kate—listen to me, Kate. If you did not mean what you said yesterday—if it was only temper that spoke and not you—I value your words as nothing. I kneel at your feet, as I have been longing to kneel this many a day, and ask the sweetest woman in the world to give me herself—just herself, the most precious thing she has."

Kate had raised her head, and the sunshine of hope and happiness was already drying her tears.

"Are you sure you love me?" she whispered.

"Darling, I think I loved you the first time I saw you,—you remember Red Rover's runaway—and it has gone on ever since. It will never change."

"Gerald, dear, I am very happy," and as he bent his lips to hers for that first kiss, Kate felt that she had won a heart that loved her for her own sake.

THE END

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